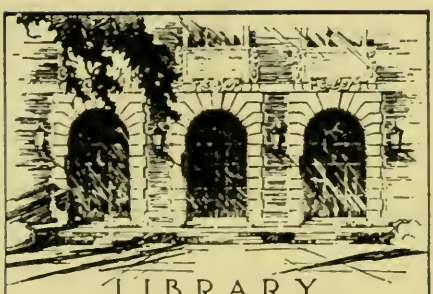

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A WOMAN'S ERROR.

A NOVEL.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

F. TROLLOPE,

Author of "Broken Fetters," "An Old Man's Secret," "A Right-Minded Woman," &c.

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A WOMAN'S ERROR.

CHAPTER I.

Maud Courtenay was not a beauty, but her forehead was high and intellectual, her eyes dark and large, her mouth expressive, the upper lip denoting a haughty temper.

Robert, the only brother of Maud, was a remarkably good looking young man, exceedingly even tempered, with a mind not very energetic but of a very impulsive nature. He was a fine, manly youth, and at the time our story commences in his twentieth year.

The mother of Maud and Robert was a widow, a kind-hearted, amiable woman, frank, generous, and good-tempered. Her husband had been dead four or five years.

Maud was in her nineteenth year and had just, what is termed, completed her education. The affection subsisting between mother and daughter was all that could be wished. They loved each other devotedly, intensely. Still there was little similarity in their characters; the mother could not comprehend the daughter, who was dissimilar in almost every respect, and whose mind had been cast in a different mould. The mother was deficient in that high intellect which so eminently distinguished the daughter.

Maud's nature was peculiar, a nature not often met with, generally misunderstood and rarely properly appreciated. She had poetry in her soul but no sickly sentimentality. She was an ardent lover of nature and had she consulted her own feelings would have settled down in some sequestered, romantic spot, but she felt she had

a duty to perform to others, and that unless she carried out God's mission there would be neither rest nor peace for her.

Mrs. Courtenay was well up in household affairs, her servants were judiciously managed, and she was generally respected by them. She understood theoretically, if not practically, the art of cookery; she used her needle dexterously; she occasionally indulged in novel reading, but never neglected her other duties for this secondary pleasure. Her greatest care was to give her children a good education.

It was one of Mrs. Courtenay's fixed notions that as soon as the education of a girl was completed her next duty was to look out some eligible man with whom to fall in love. She was not a mercenary woman, but her idea was that no woman could be comfortably settled in life till she became a wife. It was, therefore, not to be wondered at that she often urged these opinions upon Maud; but Maud had different notions. Love had, as yet, formed no part of her medita-

tions or studies. The mother's commonplace discourses on this, her favourite theme, had somewhat disgusted the delicate mind of the daughter.

The family group of the Courtenays is not completed; there is still another member of the household to be introduced, Blanche Moore, the orphan niece of Mrs. Courtenay, whose parents had died twelve or fourteen months before our tale commenced.

Blanche was just Maud's age, but there was a wide difference in their characters. Maud was of a sedate, almost melancholy disposition, whilst Blanche was lively, gay, good-tempered and playful. She was a loveable girl and her nature soft and tender, though somewhat commonplace, but she was free from meanness and tolerably unselfish. In many respects she resembled her aunt, but Mrs. Courtenay was greatly her superior.

Blanche was fond of her cousin Maud, but as incapable of understanding her character as

was her mother. It would have been strange if characters so opposite could have comprehended her deeply thinking nature.

Robert Courtenay had been leading a life of idleness at home, waiting for a commission which had been promised him some months. He was clever, and had abilities of which few young men of his age could boast. He was a good linguist, well up in mathematics, versed in both ancient and modern history, and possessed a fair share of general knowledge; but he wanted energy, industry and perseverance. Unfortunately, too, he had no taste for reading or study. It is true, he would commence any new scheme energetically, but he soon wearied of it, and started in pursuit of something fresh. Like most young men of his character he had no notion of economy, consequently he got into debt and his mother was constantly being called upon to pay bills which were presented to her, which like many other fond mothers she did with scarcely any remonstrance. She felt she knew

perfectly her son's disposition and real goodness, and she wished it understood by those around her that she equally comprehended the disposition of her daughter.

CHAPTER II.

It was Sunday, the sun shining brightly, the birds singing in the shrubbery as if they would split their tiny throats, all nature looked gay and full of animation. The Courtenays were enjoying the sunshine and their breakfast in a room looking on to a pretty lawn and well stocked flower beds. The open window admitted entrance to a verandah, covered with creeping plants, beyond which extended the gardens, bounded by a thick hedge, shutting out the high road and preventing passers by overlooking the grounds.

"Maud," said her brother, "do you think Woodhouse will come this morning?"

"I am expecting him every minute," Maud

replied, "he promised that he would be in time to accompany us to church."

"Ah! Maud, it's all very fine making promises in the evening, but when a man wakes in the morning it's quite another thing. Woodhouse would have to be up early to walk nearly five miles. I don't much think he will tell the same tale this morning that he did last evening."

"Will he not, Master Robert Courtenay," cried a cheerful voice through the open window. It was that of Mr. Woodhouse, who had overheard Robert's remark.

"The old adage fulfilled," laughed Robert, rising and holding out his hand. "I need not give the words. How are you?"

"Never better," said Woodhouse, entering the room. "This lovely morning is enough to make us all well. I am glad to see you enjoying the good things the gods have sent you. I am anxious to join you."

"Yes, thank Heaven!" said Mrs. Courtenay, "we are all in health."

"Put down your hat and stick, Cecil, and come and join our breakfast party. You must be hungry after your walk," said Maud.

"Thank you; I have a tolerable appetite, I can assure you, which will be more plainly perceived after I have made an onslaught upon the viands before me."

"That's right," cried Robert; "I like to see a fellow enjoy his breakfast."

"Robert, let me give you a word of advice. In future don't libel your friends behind their backs, as they may overhear you as I did just now," said Woodhouse, good humouredly.

"Thank you," observed Robert, laughing. "I was only 'measuring your corn by my own bushel.' I don't think I should have turned out so early."

Mr. Woodhouse was a man of about thirty-four years of age, tall, and with a somewhat dignified bearing, with a high, expansive forehead, expressive eyes, a mouth extremely beauti-

ful. In fact, his whole face beamed with intelligence and good-humour.

He was cousin to Mrs. Courtenay, and felt great affection for her and her children. He lived at a charming place, between four and five miles from the residence of his cousin, called Pentlow Hall, which had been in his family for many generations. He was a bachelor, and had neither kith nor kin, with the exception of Mrs. Courtenay and her son and daughter. Blanche Moore he knew little of, but when they met he was invariably kind to her, as, indeed, he ever was to all around him.

Our party at Bellevue had scarcely finished breakfast ere the bells of the different churches chimed forth to invite the faithful to their pleasant duties, and the three ladies were speedily attired. Mrs. Courtenay, Blanche, and Robert led the way across the little lawn, followed by Woodhouse and Maud.

"Why, my dear Maud," said her companion,

placing her hand on his arm, "I have not seen you for an age."

"Three whole days," replied Maud, with something approaching a smile upon her countenance.

"Yes, 'three whole days.'" Woodhouse, repeated her words. "What have you been doing those three long days?"

"Nothing."

"'Nothing can come of nothing,' Shakspeare says."

"Still I have done nothing. I am only a drone in the hive," murmured the young girl, sadly.

"There, my dear Maud, you do injustice to yourself. I am quite certain you have not been idle; you have been studying, reading, singing, and playing."

"That is true," replied Maud.

"And is that what you call being a drone in the hive?"

"Yes; reading is my greatest happiness. I

had almost said my only pleasure," replied Maud, quietly; "for there is nothing in my present monotonous life to interest me or to benefit others. I seem to have no aim, nothing to look forward to, nothing to make me anything beyond a dead weight on society; mine seems to me almost a living death."

"My dear girl," said Woodhouse, "do not give way to such bitter feelings. I know but too well the evils they engender in after life."

As he spoke he looked at Maud with almost fatherly tenderness.

They reached the church porch and Maud experienced a revulsion of feeling; her companion's kind manner and kinder words had had their effect, and caused her to repent, ere entering the sacred building, the bitterness of feeling she had shown and felt. Maud was aware that Cecil Woodhouse could read her inner thoughts, that he was the only being in the world who understood her character and her sentiments, and his gentle rebuke touched her heart. With an effort she

conquered her repinings, and knelt in sincere humility to ask God's forgiveness for her irritability.

From the time the Courtenays came to reside in the town, near to Pentlow Hall, the inmates of the cottage and the hall had lived on terms of the greatest intimacy, and Maud had learnt to regard Woodhouse as the kindest and dearest friend she possessed. He, too, understood and appreciated her high principles, her refined and sensitive mind, her pure and lofty sentiments. He saw her intellect was of no ordinary description; but he did not realise the full extent and scope of it, nor how ardently she thirsted to obtain the greatest amount of knowledge her sex was capable of grasping.

Maud, although her mother had given her as good an education as falls to the lot of most girls, was by no means well educated, if we except her musical talent, which had been well cultivated, and in which science she was a complete proficient, an excellent pianist, and sang not only well

enough to give intense pleasure to herself, but to fascinate those who heard her; and this power afforded her a source of happiness which never failed.

In her childhood Maud's health had not been good, and her delicate constitution had prevented her giving that time to study which was required, and consequently she lost the advantages of first-rate instructors whilst her father lived, and, when her health improved, her widowed mother had not the means of providing more than the usual routine education of a respectable boarding-school.

Maud did not, when she left school, feel her deficiencies; but gradually, as her mind expanded, she became restless and dissatisfied, and yearned for a larger supply of books. She, at times, was dejected and sighed for the means of obtaining knowledge, not that she felt less clever than the bulk of the young people around her, nor did she feel the common shame of an ordinary mind at the fear of being thought ignorant; but there

was an innate conviction that if the gate of knowledge was once opened she should take no mean position in the world of letters; and most truly did Maud feel that a nobler and higher mission was the one that should be hers; therefore she chafed at her present life, which she considered one of idleness.

When Cecil Woodhouse first became intimate with the Courtenays, Maud was a mere child, little more than eleven years of age. He soon became much attached to her, and regarded her as a little sister; but now, since the child had grown into the woman, that sisterly affection had changed to a deep and ardent love, changed quite unconsciously to himself. This guileless girl had become the alpha and omega of all his earthly wishes, she was mingled in all his thoughts, and was the prominent figure in every picture of his imagination. He was aware that Maud's affection and liking for him were only those experienced for an elder brother, to whom she could look up for counsel, but he

felt that, if he could win her love, as he had already obtained her confidence, it would reward him for long years of unrequited affection.

Woodhouse mourned over the evident bitterness with which Maud looked on life, for he well knew how keenly, how painfully she lamented the want of sympathy with her kindred. He was perfectly aware that he was the only one who understood her, and he also knew that she appreciated his sympathy and affection, but she had not the slightest notion of how he loved her. Woodhouse knew to the full extent how bitterly she deplored the want of that high education she felt was hers by right, but he did not guess that her intellect was of the high order it really was.

As time wore on, his affection increased, and his appreciation of her character became more exalted; his was not the hot, fiery love of boyhood, burning intensely for a short time, and then dying out, but a steady, deep, holy, sanctifying feeling.

CHAPTER III.

The Courtenays had few acquaintances in Bridgnorth, for their reduced circumstances compelled them to live in a comparatively secluded manner. There was, however, one family with whom they were upon terms of the strictest friendship, and with whom they had been intimate some years, when residing at Black Rock, near Dublin.

This family of the Ryans had come to England soon after the Courtenays had left Ireland, and taken up their abode at Bridgnorth, in a pretty little house not more than a quarter of a mile from Bellevue.

General Ryan was a widower, with twin

daughters. His wife had shared many hardships with him in foreign lands, for he had served many years in the —th regiment, and she had greatly contributed to his happiness, under very trying difficulties, by the happy and cheerful manner in which she bore all the hardships and discomforts of barrack life. It mattered not to her whether she slept on a feather bed, the floor, or a "shake down;" she never complained. She was, in every respect, a loving wife, a fond mother, and an exemplary woman; she only lived till her daughters attained the age of eleven, but like a true-hearted woman she had made the best use of those few years, by instilling into the hearts and minds of her children virtuous and moral principles, and after her death those principles expanded and flourished.

When his wife died, General Ryan retired from the army, and went to reside at Black Rock, his native place; and on the Courtenays leaving Ireland, they were soon followed by the Ryans, who joined them at Bridgnorth, and had resided

there ever since. The two girls were named Ellen and Edith.

A few days after the Sunday morning on which we introduced our readers to the Courtenays, Maud sat alone at her piano, her hands resting listlessly on the keys; her dark eyes fixed with a strange, earnest expression upon the portrait of her mother, which hung opposite to her. She had been in a deep reverie for some time, and was only roused from it on hearing the firm, manly step of Woodhouse, whom she sprang up to meet with a gladsome smile.

"I have disturbed you, my dear Maud," said the young man, affectionately taking her hand. "You must sit down again, and let us enjoy a little music together."

"What shall I play?" asked Maud, again seating herself at the piano.

"Suppose you give me this exquisite Sonata by Beethoven. I always enjoy the charming and correct way in which you render his music."

He placed the music before her and seated himself by her side.

Maud deserved all his encomiums; she played the Sonata in A. in a most delicate and touching manner, but as her slender fingers produced the last low plaintive notes, she again sank back on her chair, and her thoughts seemed to wander far away from all around her, whilst an almost happy smile beamed over her countenance. But this happy smile faded in a minute or so, and as she raised her eyes to her mother's portrait, it was replaced by an almost sad expression.

Woodhouse noticed the look he had so often seen before. He watched her for a moment, and then, following the direction of her eyes.

"She is very dear to you, Maud."

"No words can express how dear," said his companion, her bosom heaving with suppressed emotion.

"You are sad this morning, Maud. What has happened—has anything gone wrong?"

"Nothing this morning; I have been sitting here alone," she replied, in a quiet tone.

Woodhouse knew what lay buried beneath those words.

"I fear I have disturbed you, Maud dear. I know you like being alone," said Cecil, with a somewhat mournful expression in his voice and manner. "I will say good-bye."

"Pray do not leave me, Cecil," she cried. "Let us go into the dear, old-fashioned garden. Come," she added more cheerfully, taking his hand and leading him from the room.

Woodhouse bent his gaze upon the girl's face, looking into the depths of her dark eyes, and read in that look her fond, confiding affection, but not the love he thirsted for.

"Lead me where you like, Maud, I will go with you," he said.

The garden behind the cottage was, as Maud had said, an old-fashioned place.

It was not extensive, but gently sloping down

to the bottom, was terminated by a row of lime trees, which threw a pleasant shade over the whole place, making it seem a spot for quiet thought and meditation. Here Cecil and Maud wandered about, conversing upon subjects, far beyond the comprehension of those around them. They had thus passed nearly an hour when Robert came into the garden.

"Halloa! Cecil, are you here?" he cried, holding out his hand to Woodhouse. "I'm glad to see you; sentimentalizing with Maud, who is, as usual, I suppose, in the clouds."

Woodhouse smiled good humouredly.

"Where is mamma," continued Robert, addressing his sister.

"In her room writing," returned his sister.

"Ah! then I shall go to her, so you may go on with your learned discourses. Good-bye, Woodhouse, for the present."

"I am here for the day," said Cecil, "and shall see you at dinner, I suppose."

"Not a doubt of that; I am never absent at grubbing time," was the good-natured, inelegant rejoinder of Robert, as he went away to find his mother.

CHAPTER IV.

In our account of the family of the Ryans, we forgot to mention that Ellen, the elder of the twins, was engaged to be married to a young curate, who resided at the Rectory House at Easton, a pretty little place, not far from Bridgnorth. The wedding took place on the morning after the day named in our last chapter. The Courtenays and Cecil Woodhouse were present on the happy occasion. Woodhouse did not remain long after the ceremony had been completed, having important business to attend to, and the Courtenays, thinking the General and his daughter would wish to be alone, left early in the afternoon.

The Courtenays had returned to their little cottage, and about an hour before sunset, Blanche and Robert were busily engaged training some over-luxuriant plants in the front garden, whilst Maud and her mother were seated in the parlour, inhaling the pure evening breeze, coming through the open window. They had remained some time without speaking, Maud's hand resting fondly in her mother's. The latter was the first to break the silence.

"Maud, my love, I wish to speak to you on a matter with which it is important you should be made acquainted."

"What is it, dear mother?" said the girl, looking earnestly in her mother's eyes.

"It is respecting our good friend Woodhouse."

"Well, mother, what about Cecil?"

"I have lately thought much about his great intimacy here."

Maud looked wonderingly at her mother, and could not imagine her meaning.

"I have thought," continued Mrs. Courtenay,

"that he has become very much attached to you —yes, in love with you, and what's more, I strongly suspect—"

"Suspect what?" cried Maude.

"That you love Cecil."

Mrs. Courtenay looked her daughter full in the face, with a half serious expression on her countenance.

"I love Cecil, as a brother, dearly; and I am sure he loves me as he would a sister, had he one," said the young girl frankly.

"Ah, my love, that's all very well to say so," continued Mrs. Courtenay, somewhat at a loss what to say next, "but I see with a mother's eyes, and look upon his love in a very different light."

"But," said Maud, a new light dawning upon her, and for the first time comprehending her mother's meaning, "do you imagine for a moment that I feel for Cecil an affection that, were he to ask me to become his wife, I should consent, or that he regards me with any more affection

than a brother gives a sister; if you do, you are mistaken, dear mamma."

"Well, Maud, you are old enough to be able to judge for yourself; and I perhaps might not have mentioned my suspicions, had not your brother Robert named to me yesterday his ideas on the point."

"Robert!" said Maud, contemptuously, her lip curling as she spoke, but not uttering another word.

"Yes, my dear, and his opinion and my own coincide, that Woodhouse is, to use Roberts' own words, 'over head and ears in love with you,' and is desirous that some day or other you should become his wife."

"Hush, mother," said Maud, with firmness, "Cecil is just the same to me as he was when I was a little girl of twelve years old. I cannot see the slightest change in his manner, and I trust I never may. I hope he will ever love me as—a—sister."

Maud rose and left the room, going straight to

her chamber, that uninterrupted she might commune with her own heart. What was it made her pause in uttering those last few words to her mother? Could it be that she had never suspected or analysed the innermost feelings of her heart, and that she was just awakening from a self-deceiving dream? This was something like the truth. She had always spoken freely and unreservedly to Cecil Woodhouse, had placed in him the most implicit confidence. His coming had always been a comfort and pleasure to her; his presence was a surety of peace. His society, in her solitude, was a priceless boon, for what solitude is so wearying as that felt when surrounded by loving hearts and relatives who have neither sympathy of sentiment nor unison of thought or feeling. Love had hitherto formed no part of Maud's aspirations, her only desire was for a sympathising companion, and Woodhouse was the only being who understood or appreciated her rightly. Was it not then natural that her young heart clung to him, and

that he should be mixed up in all her day dreams. She felt, when he absented himself, that there was a blankness and a bitterness which was only dispelled by his presence, casting a ray of light, like a sunshine, over her perturbed and troubled spirit. Maud knew not that she had learned to love Cecil otherwise than as a brother, so gradually and imperceptibly the feeling had crept into her heart.

"Oh, mother dear," cried Maud, tears falling plentifully down her cheeks, "why did you undeceive me? Why, oh, why, not let me continue in my blessed dream. He only loves me as a brother, and I—I thought I loved him as a sister would. Oh, how I have been self deceiving—cheating myself in the only happiness I knew. Oh, what misery may it not entail upon me," and she wept bitterly.

The next day a messenger came from Pentlow Hall to Mrs. Courtenay to tell her that Cecil Woodhouse was unwell, and that he wished

to see her. She lost no time in acceding to his request, for she was very sincerely attached to Cecil, and was alarmed at hearing of his illness. All her fears were dissipated when she got to the Hall. Woodhouse was not seriously ill, but he was languid and feverish, suffering from severe head-ache. Mrs. Courtenay bathed his hot temples with eau-de-Cologne, and towards evening the pain in his head had considerably abated, but great weakness and languor remained.

Before taking leave of Woodhouse, Mrs. Courtenay gave instructions for barley water to be made, and bade him try and sleep.

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Courtenay," said the invalid, "for your kindness. I wish you and Maud would come and spend a few days at the Hall; I feel too unwell to be able to leave the house, and shall be so lonely."

"Well, Cecil, I know of nothing to prevent our coming, so I will now bid you good-night, and make the best of my way home, that Maud

and I may get our requisites for a week's visit ready this night, to enable us to start early in the morning, when I trust I shall find you very much better."

CHAPTER V.

It was a source of great pleasure to Maud when informed by her mother of Cecil Woodhouse's invitation for them to spend a week at Pentlow Hall, and that they were to go early in the morning. The girl at the moment thought not how Cecil loved her, she only knew that she was going to spend a whole week in constant communion with one whose presence she had suddenly discovered was like sunshine to her soul. Her imagination roamed with him to distant lands, in which her love pictured a perfect Paradise. Every thought, every feeling of her heart was in some way connected with him. His voice it was that ever seemed to echo in her ear

as she stood entranced, gazing on the setting sun, each moment sailing deeper and deeper in the broad expanse of ocean. He it was who possessed the power to soothe comfort and calm her when the bitter outpourings of her proud spirit broke forth, astonishing those around her.

Maud, young as she was, had peered into the secret depths of thought and feeling, and studied human nature deeply and intensely. She judged not things by their seeming. Perhaps it would have been better for her had her mind been less refined, her perception less clear, her feelings less acute and sensitive. Deeply was the love of all that was beautiful implanted in her heart. Few were gifted so largely with the power of discerning amongst her fellow creatures the honest man from the hypocrite, the refined and high-souled being from the coarse and common-minded groveller, the gold from the alloy. A strange sadness often pervaded her spirit, causing those around her to wonder that one so young

should have so thoughtful and so sad a brow. Maud had studied the mystery of life early; and so much had she reflected that actual experience could have given her but little more pain. Her spirit mourned over the folly, the falsehood, and the littleness she met with in the world. In truth hers was a strange and lonely nature.

Mrs. Courtenay and Maud did not reach Pentlow Hall till late in the afternoon, when they found Cecil much better, but very pale and languid.

"I fear you are fatigued after your walk," said Woodhouse, to Mrs. Courtenay.

"A little," answered the widow.

"And you, dear Maud, are you tired?"

"Not in the least, thank you, Cecil," was the girl's reply.

"I will take a seat for a few minutes," said Mrs. Courtenay, "and when I have rested I will go and give the housekeeper some instructions," which intention she fulfilled after a few minutes' resting, leaving Maud sitting in a chair opposite to Cecil.

"Come here, dear Maud, and sit by me," said the invalid, in a languid voice.

Maud crossed the room, and seated herself on a low chair beside him. He took her soft hand in his, and pressed it affectionately, saying,

"How very kind of you to come and stay with such an invalided old fellow. You will, I fear, find it very dull and prosy."

"No, dear Cecil, I am sure I shall not," and the girl looked fixedly in his face, whilst her dark eyes expressed such deep and passionate love as might have revealed to him the secret of her heart.

The week passed away, and Maud and her mother returned home, the former declaring she never before knew time pass so rapidly. In after years Maud often thought of that pleasant week she had spent at Pentlow Hall.

"Well, Maud," said Mrs. Courtenay to her daughter, the morning following their return home, "I don't suppose you will venture to tell me, after what I have seen, that Cecil does not

love you—your regarding him only as a brother is all nonsense; I am quite certain you love each other."

The blood rushed to Maud's face and head as her mother awoke her from her delicious dream, and made her sensible of the reality. She felt how blindly, how madly she had hitherto deceived herself, but pride took possession of her heart, and she replied in a frigid manner—

"Mamma, I must beg that you will never mention this subject to me again—Woodhouse's feelings towards me are nothing beyond those of a dear, kind-hearted friend."

"And yours," asked the mother smiling.

"My feelings none can understand but myself," replied Maud, loftily, "and I don't think even a mother has a right to ask for, nay, to press me for my confidence."

"Surely, Maud, a mother has a perfect right to be made acquainted with every secret of a daughter's heart. She should be told, not be obliged to ask for her confidence."

"Not so, mamma; there are feelings which cannot be described. Do you think you could understand my heart were it laid bare before you, or comprehend my thoughts if you could see them passing through my mind? No, mamma, no; you might study for ever!" cried Maud, bitterly.

"Upon my word, child," said Mrs. Courtenay, in a displeased tone of voice, "You have the most extraordinary notions I ever met with; I only hope your high-flown and absurd ideas will not bring misery upon you."

"I hope not," was Maud's curt reply.

"I neither like nor approve this secresy about Cecil Woodhouse," again resumed the mother.

"Secresy!" cried Maud, the blood rushing to her temples, "what do you mean?"

"Mean!" replied the mother, "I mean what I say."

"What! may I not converse freely and unrestrainedly with a valued friend, the only one to whom I can speak my thoughts with the certainty of being understood, a friend who has known me

from childhood; surely I ought to be allowed to do so without being called to an account for it."

"I have no wish to call you to account, as you express it; but I feel, that as your mother, I am bound to shield you from the tittle-tattle of your acquaintances; you are now at an age when you must either be engaged, or not outstep the limits of society; the world will talk you know."

"Let the world talk," cried Maud, her upper lip curling scornfully; "what do I care for the world, or the contemptible hypocrites in it. Let them talk and gossip as much as they please, their empty heads are always wanting some new trifle to cavil at and to occupy their thoughts. Pray, mamma, who *are* the world who would interest themselves upon my account?"

"Well, they *do*, you know, Maud. Why it's not an hour since that Robert and Blanche——"

"Oh! Robert and Blanche are the world!" cried the young girl, with a sneer, "are they so penetrating? How their intellects must have expanded."

"Maud, Maud!" cried her mother, angrily, "You have become very unamiable, I know even Cecil Woodhouse notices it."

"Cecil, perhaps, may know one great cause of my 'unamiability,' or at least of that bitterness which has become a part of my nature, and of which I cannot rid myself," answered the girl sadly.

"And pray, girl, what may be the cause? Are you beginning to think Cecil may yet own his love for you? or are you becoming soured from a dread of unrequited affection? for I feel certain Cecil often feels disgusted with your bitter temper. Only look at Blanche, and see how merry, cheerful, and light-hearted she always is."

This imprudent allusion to Blanche roused all the pride in Maud's heart, causing the blood to rush to her face and head.

"Mamma," she said with sternness, "I would not have believed that you could have so outraged your nature as to behave in so coarse a manner to me; whatever Cecil Woodhouse's sen-

timents may have been, they are now those of a brother. I have loved him from childhood as a kind, good friend. Seek not to question me further, for I will make no answer; as for what you term 'the world,' I set its gossipers at defiance. Robert and Blanche may indulge in their tittle-tattle to their heart's content. *Their* opinions can give me no uneasiness, I will not even censure—I only pity them." And with a curl of her lip, and a haughty toss of the head, Maud walked from the room and went direct to her own little chamber, which she paced up and down like a caged lioness; her thoughts were of the bitterest kind, and after a while she burst into uncontrolled tears.

"My mother is right," said the sorrowful girl unconsciously speaking aloud. "I have no doubt he loved me once—but now—now that I love him with my whole soul, it is too late—too late. Shall *they* see my wretchedness—shall *they* witness my crushed and blighted affection—never. Oh, that I had known my own heart ere it was too

late—that feeling I thought only a sister's love for a brother, was the deepest, tenderest passion woman can have for man. If his love for me has passed away, *they* shall never know how my heart is afflicted, even should it be at the expense of letting Cecil think I have grown cold and worldly-minded."

At length she stopped pacing the room, and the deep dark shadow of despair faded from her brow and was replaced by a bright and holy light; she clasped her hands and sank upon her knees as she cried—

"Oh! good and merciful God, I thank Thee for the power thou hast given me, enabling me to overcome the pain of that mighty affliction, with which in Thy wisdom thou hast thought it expedient to afflict me; I feel the talents that thou has blest me with and which thou intendest I should use for the benefit of my fellow creatures, thus enabling me to shut out the world and all its misery, striving only for the good of others. Oh! merciful father, be merciful unto me—be

merciful unto me, for in thee will I place all my confidence and hope, under the shadow of thy wing let me rest until all my misery be overcome."

Maud rose to her feet, her mind less agitated and with a holy feeling of thankfulness to God for the talent he had vouchsafed to her, and which she determined she would strive to improve.

CHAPTER VI.

We have another important person to describe to the reader, Edith Ryan, one of those exquisitely lovely beings who appear too fragile for the duties of life. She was in complexion the fairest of the fair, her eyes blue, expressive more of sentiment than strength of character, a mouth that a Chantrey or Roubillac might have been pleased to have chiselled, so exquisitely sweet was its expression. Her hair was of golden hue, drooping over her shoulders in luxuriant curls.

Edith Ryan's mind and character were as pure and lovely as her external beauty; meek, generous, patient, gentle, and forgiving, she

was in every respect a loving and devoted daughter, in most characteristics resembling her father, but very dissimilar to her sister Ellen, who was more a daughter of earth, a merry light-hearted girl, fond of society; whilst Edith was almost ethereal. Edith was the firm friend of Maud Courtenay, and loved her as a sister, but like the rest could not always comprehend her. Frequently when Maud broke forth into her bitter and scornful passions, Edith, in her mild, gentle way, would reprove her. Misunderstanding her high intellect, Edith bemoaned her friend's pride, which she called one of her besetting sins, and strange, as it may appear, this gentle girl was the only one, with the exception of Cecil Woodhouse, who ever spoke reprovingly to Maud with impunity.

Edith had led a very retired life, scarcely ever having left her father's house. At this period of our story, she one morning received a kind and pressing invitation from an old schoolfellow, who had been married to a man of high birth and large

fortune, to spend the season in London with them.

After reading her friend's letter, she handed it to her father, saying :

"It is very kind of Julia to invite me to London, but I do not know how I can leave you, dear papa."

"The change will benefit you, darling child, in every respect; and although I shall not much like parting with you, I wish you to accept Lady Boothby's invitation. She was a great favourite of mine when she was at school at Black Rock. You had better write at once."

Edith, after sundry bewailings at leaving her father alone in his quiet home, wrote the reply, accepting Lady Boothby's invitation, fixing the following week for her journey.

On the evening of the appointed day Edith arrived at Portman Square, somewhat fatigued by her journey. She was conducted to the drawing-room, which was untenanted, but she had scarcely seated herself when a young Frenchwoman entered the room, saying in tolerable English :

"Will Mademoiselle be so good as to step up to my lady's dressing-room?"

Edith arose and followed the Frenchwoman, and in a couple of minutes was affectionately welcomed by her former schoolfellow.

"I am so happy to see you, dear Edith. I thought you would not mind coming to my private snuggery, where you may rest for awhile without being disturbed. Are you not very tired?"

"Rather," said Edith, returning her friend's embrace.

"Well, we have plenty of time before dinner to have a quiet chat, but in the meantime I will order some refreshments for you, after your long journey."

"Pray do not, dear Julia. I really had rather not take anything before dinner."

"As you please, love. We have no one to dine with us except Harry's brother Augustus; so you can be quite at your ease and rest yourself."

"I suppose it is a rare thing for you to dine without company—you are generally so gay?" asked Edith, with a smile.

"To tell the truth, it is almost an exceptionable event for us to dine alone."

"But if I understood you correctly, you will not be alone," said Edith.

"We consider Augustus nobody—he is one of us."

"Is not this 'nobody,' as you designate your brother-in-law, the gentleman who has gained no small notoriety as a *litterateur?*" said Edith, interrogatively.

"Yes, as you remark, he has gained no small share of praise for his literary performances, and his books have been appreciated both by the public and the critics. He is an eccentric, strange fellow, but I am very much attached to him; in fact, he wins his way to all hearts; he has something in him that attracts and fascinates. But, my dear Edith, how remiss I am, chatting about a person you never saw, instead of conducting you to your bedroom."

Taking Edith by the hand she led her to the room that had been set apart for her, saying:

"I hope you will be able to make yourself comfortable here. Don't fatigue yourself by making an elaborate toilette. When you wish for the servant to assist you, ring the bell. I must leave you now to make my own preparation."

Edith sauntered round the room, and each step she took gave a new sensation of pleasure to her. Not only was the apartment beautifully furnished, and with every luxury; but she found that her kind friend had remembered her peculiar taste for flowers and books: on the dressing-table were placed vases filled with exquisite blossoms of the flowers that, when at school, she most loved and admired; nor were her favourite authors forgotten, for on one of the tables were arranged the works of Byron, Scott, Bulwer, &c., all showing that her hostess was determined to make her happy during her stay.

Her survey of her sleeping apartment having been finished, she rang the bell for the lady's-maid, who immediately attended the summons. Edith could scarcely refrain from smiling when

the maid begged her to be seated, and instantly commenced the arrangement of her beautiful hair, every now and then, as she let the curls droop over her neck, speaking rapturously of the length and loveliness. This important part of the toilette being completed to perfect satisfaction, a robe of white silk, trimmed with peach-blossom, was arranged; and to the maid's astonishment no jewel was required beyond a small diamond clasp round her exquisitely white throat. Emily gazed with evident admiration at the slender and graceful form before her with its almost spiritual beauty.

The toilette completed, Emily said:

"If you please, Miss, her ladyship bade me ask you to go to her room as soon as you were ready."

"Have the goodness to shew me the way," replied Edith, rising, and taking a last look in the glass.

No sooner had Edith entered Lady Boothby's

room, than her ladyship, with unmistakable admiration, exclaimed:

"My dear Edith, how lovely you have grown! I always thought you pretty, but now—"

"You see through rose-coloured glasses," interrupted Edith, with a gratified smile.

"Excuse me, dear girl, I spoke no idle or unmeaning compliment; I really could not resist the exclamation. Come, I am anxious for Augustus to see you; he thoroughly appreciates beauty. I suppose poets always do."

Taking Edith's hand, they descended to the drawing-room; where, reclining on a couch, book in hand, and apparently in deep thought, was a gentleman, who immediately arose on the entrance of the ladies. He appeared about three or four and thirty years of age; was tall, with figure and form commandingly and strikingly handsome; dark expressive eyes, and with a mouth which gave to his whole countenance great intelligence.

"Augustus," said Lady Boothby, "I have great pleasure in introducing my friend, Miss Edith Ryan, an old schoolfellow of mine. Edith, Mr. Augustus Boothby, my brother-in-law."

The gentleman bowed, and Edith blushed, and at the moment Sir Harry Boothby joined them and was introduced to Edith. Sir Harry was older than his brother, but they were remarkably alike; Augustus, however, had a somewhat sterner countenance than Sir Harry, whose face wore a more amiable expression, the former giving the idea that its possessor had gone through some sorrow, but which, passed away, had left its impress.

A pleasant conversation followed, Sir Harry expressing his pleasure at seeing his wife's friend under his roof, and hoping the re-union would be a source of great happiness to them both.

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CHAPTER VII.

Augustus Boothby was the younger and only brother of Sir Harry. Their parents had died within a month after Sir Harry had attained his majority, consequently when Augustus was quite a youth. As a child, he was somewhat impetuous and passionate, and very difficult to control; but he possessed a warm heart, and was fondly attached to his elder brother. As Augustus advanced in years, he displayed great talent, and his love and reverence for all that was beautiful in nature and noble in art was evident. He loved music intensely, and its influence upon his nature was most marvellous. One evening, when only twelve years of age, a lovely girl, who

was on a visit at his father's, made a wonderful impression upon him. He was transfixed by her delicate and fragile figure, by her expressive and intellectual countenance. He stood far back in the room, watching her every movement, and when at length she sang some exquisite melody, the boy became so entranced that he actually wept with the pleasure he experienced. Why he wept he had no idea at the time; but in after years, he fully understood the feeling, and often wished he could again shed such soothing tears.

Sir Harry, at the death of his father, came into possession of an immense fortune and large estates, whilst Augustus was left only two thousand a year. At this time, the latter was a fellow-commoner of Trinity College, Cambridge. Whilst still at college he commenced authorship, and soon after took his degree, going out a high wrangler. He became very popular in the world of letters, esqecially as a poet. His talents were of the highest order, his tastes the purest and the

most refined. His works were universally read, and his society was courted by the highest in the land. But Augustus cared not for the world's flattery, and as he went into society he gazed calmly down as a bright and beautiful far-off star on all around and beneath him.

By the world he was deemed cold, haughty and stern, and although all the gay and beautiful women fluttered around him and idolized his genius, they dreaded and feared the man. They could not discern the mine of worth beneath this apparent coldness and sternness. After he left Cambridge he resided with his brother in Portman Square for one or two seasons, after which he went to the family seat in Devonshire, previous to leaving for two years travelling on the Continent, visiting Spain, Germany, France, and Switzerland, in which latter country he indulged in all his poetic fancies, and often, in after days, when in the gay and thronged saloons of Belgravia, he longed to be far away, climbing some high mountain, rambling through the dense and solemn

forests, or seeking in the fields wild flowers hitherto unseen by him, for the merest atom of nature delighted him. In society he was proud and haughty; he had studied mankind, and thoroughly understood the deformities that lie beneath the brilliant veil that covers society, and he felt it a relief when he could turn from man to nature.

Mighty as was his intellect, great as was his talent, noble his aspirations, high and proud his spirit, Augustus, when alone with nature in the solitude of some glen, was humble as a child, and all that was good was roused within him, for like all great minds, nature had a powerful and beneficial influence over him.

When about twenty-six years of age he became passionately enamoured and fondly attached to a peerless beauty of high rank. His love for her amounted to idolatry; he adored and worshipped her, and for a time the fickle beauty returned his affection, and accepted him as her future husband. But no sooner did a nobleman and a

wealthier man cross her path, and ask her to become his wife, than she forgot all the constant devotion of Augustus, and not only promised to give the hand she had pledged to him, to his rival, but wrote a coldly polite note, informing him that she had changed her mind, alleging she did not think their natures would agree, or their union be productive of happiness to either, and therefore she deemed it desirable to relinquish him. She did not say she had found a much more desirable *parti.*

We will not attempt to describe Augustus Boothby's feelings after reading this note. His heart was wounded, but his pride received and felt the deepest shock. He had thought this beauty perfect in every respect, one in whom he could place the greatest confidence, one who would enter into all his feelings. He had thought her an angel, but, alas! he found her only a worthless, worldly-minded woman.

From that time his naturally passionate temper showed itself in his almost every speech,

and he no longer felt the slightest desire for society. His affections rested entirely upon his brother and his brother's wife. To Lady Boothby he was greatly attached, not merely because she was his brother's wife, but for her many good qualities of both head and heart.

We deemed it requisite for the future development of our tale to digress somewhat, for the purpose of giving an outline of the Boothby family, but we now resume our story. On the night of Edith's accompanying Lady Boothby to the drawing-room, Augustus marked her entrance, thought her very lovely, and that her countenance was indicative of a pure and unsullied mind.

He had been in the habit of looking with coldness on many beautiful women he met, for the shameful conduct of his first love still rankled in his heart and soured his temper.

Now, for the first time for years, his eyes rested with pleasure on the lovely form and features of the young girl, and he thought he

could discover in her face, so pure and gentle, something like truth.

After dinner, when the two gentlemen rejoined Lady Boothby and her visitor in the drawing room, Julia asked Edith to sing one of her favourite songs, but the latter, with her usual timidity, hesitated.

Augustus rose, and taking her hand, led her to the piano, saying, in an encouraging and respectful tone,

"Do not fear criticism; we are true lovers of music."

"Thank you," replied the young girl. "I must confess I am both timid and nervous. What shall I sing?" she asked, turning to Lady Boothby.

"One of Moore's charming melodies."

"Shall I turn over the leaves for you?" asked Augustus.

"Thank you," said Edith, "I prefer doing that for myself. It always makes me nervous if anyone is looking over the music I am playing."

Augustus seated himself a short distance from the piano, and listened, with feelings such as he had not experienced for years, to the exquisite pathos with which Edith sung that charming song, "The Meeting of the Waters."

She had a splendid voice, and her notes were clear as a bell, whilst a sweet smile played around her mouth as she sung, that told how she entered heart and soul into the words and music.

Edith rose as soon as the song was concluded, and Augustus started from a sort of pleasant dream in which he had been indulging, took her hand to lead her to a seat on the sofa. He uttered no compliment on her singing, but he pressed her hand respectfully, and Edith could see by the expression on his countenance, that he was pleased.

"Thank you, dear girl," said Lady Boothby, "it is a long time since I have heard one of Moore's charming melodies so exquisitely rendered."

"They are indeed charming," said Sir Harry,

"and I am much obliged to you, Miss Ryan, and delighted with the exquisite taste you have displayed."

"What say you, Augustus?" asked Lady Boothby.

"If I were to say half what I felt whilst Miss Ryan was singing, I fear I should be set down as a flatterer."

"No one will accuse you of flattery," observed Sir Harry, with a smile.

In pleasant converse the first evening of Edith's visit in Portman Square passed agreeably. The following morning Augustus made his appearance at an unusually early hour, to attend the ladies in their ride or drive in the park. Three weeks passed, and each day Augustus accompanied them, always returning to dine, and pass the evening, or escort them to the Opera or a ball.

One evening whilst the gentlemen were sitting over their wine, and the ladies had retired to the drawing-room, Lady Boothby said to her visitor,

"What do you think of my brother-in-law?"

"I think him very talented," replied Edith, looking down.

"Ah, yes, of course you think him a great genius, but putting his talent aside, what do you think of the man?"

This was a home thrust which caused Edith to blush crimson, and for a moment or two she could not speak, at length she said:

"I think Mr. Boothby a very agreeable man," and then added innocently, "I don't wonder, Julia, at your loving him."

Lady Boothby looked up with a curious smile upon her countenance, but Edith's eyes were averted, and her neck and face crimson. That glance, however, was sufficient to confirm the suspicion she had for some days entertained.

"Yes," said Lady Boothby, "there is certainly something very fascinating about Augustus, something beyond his intellect, though what it is I scarcely know, for he is far from faultless. But, poor fellow, he met with a sad disappointment in early life, which has ever since

embittered his life. I think his spirit is softening now, and I sincerely hope and trust he may yet be happy."

Lady Boothby paused, and looking at Edith, was surprised to see a tear rolling down her cheek, and after awhile a low sob broke on Julia's ear. She instantly rose, and crossed over to where Edith was sitting on the sofa, and putting her arm round her waist, said :

"My dear Edith, rest your head on my bosom. Your secret is safe in my keeping!"

Edith lifted her hand, her face and head dyed with crimson blushes, confusion and shame.

"Oh! Julia, you will think me very weak and foolish, but there are times when we are unable to control our feelings," she could say no more, her tears fell fast, and choked her utterance; presently she started up and seizing her friend's hand, cried hurriedly:

"Julia, I fear—I know by your look you know—"

"Hush! my dear," said Lady Boothby, affec-

tionately, "I know all, but fear not, your secret is safe, and I rejoice in the discovery, for I hope the day is not far distant when you will become the affianced wife of Augustus. I have seen long since that he has not only been attached to you but has found great pleasure in your society. Why, then darling, should you be ashamed to own to me, an affection so pure and holy as yours. He has sought you, and although he has not yet breathed a word of love, I feel sure he soon will, and then I trust you will both be happy."

Edith laid her head on her friend's shoulder, and did feel supremely happy, for she had listened to words of truth and comfort. Many girls would have suffered keen misery rather than have acknowledged they loved a man ere that love had been asked.

Edith was right to place confidence in her loving and beloved friend, she was sure of sympathy and good advice, and moreover, she knew that the secret of her love for Augustus, a

secret which she had till then scarcely realized, would be religiously kept.

How numerous are the classes of minds in the world, and still more numerous the various grades in every class. Outwardly there appears no variation, but it is in the inner life the difference is felt. This was evidenced in the wide distinction between Edith Ryan and Maud Courtenay, both high-minded girls, and in the same class, but in an entirely different grade; we speak not of their intellect, but of their social qualities and characters.

Weeks had passed, still Augustus, who was always in attendance upon Lady Boothby and her visitor, had made no declaration of love, but it was quite evident to his sister-in-law that his hardened heart and bitter spirit were filling with gentleness and affection. One day, Lady Boothby and Augustus were left to themselves in her ladyship's morning room, as was often the case, they had been speaking of Edith.

"She is indeed a lovely girl," observed Augustus, "lovely both in mind and body."

There was a pause for a minute, and then Lady Boothby said in a kind but somewhat nervous tone:

"Augustus, I want to ask you a question—a question which I feel certain you will answer me truthfully. Do you love Edith?"

Augustus seemed astonished at the question. The idea had never before occurred to him, but he replied with a little reserve in his manner.

"May I ask, dear Julia, by what authority you put this question?"

"By the best authority in the world, my sincere affection, and the interest I take in your welfare. I had hoped—" and she paused.

"What had you hoped?" asked Augustus, with something like a smile.

"That your sternness against our sex had passed away, under the influence of my sweet amiable young friend, and that you had learnt to love her."

Augustus Boothby's usually pale face crimsoned, but he spoke not.

"I fear—" began Lady Boothby.

"Fear what, dear Julia?"

"That I may have been premature in my wish to serve you."

"If there be occasion for fear on either side, it most assuredly should be on mine, for I—I spoke unkindly to you, and I ask your forgiveness, I have had many proofs of your affection. I will answer your question. I do indeed love your lovely and amiable young friend. She has nearly obliterated from my heart the remembrance of falsehood, deceit and infamy," and his voice trembled, and his lip curled. "Yes, Edith seems to me as the refreshing spring in the midst of the burning desert did to the weary, thirsty traveller. She is indeed all truth, gentleness and kindness."

Lady Boothby saw that her brother-in-law was greatly excited, and waited a minute ere she

again addressed him. Wishing to be fully satisfied she at length said:

"Then I may conclude that you hope ere long to make dear Edith your wife?"

Augustus's face again crimsoned. This was a home question he had not contemplated, indeed it was one quite new to him, for although he had loved Edith he had never as yet thought of asking her to become his wife. However, in a very subdued voice he said:

"I shall hope some day to be united heart and soul to the dear girl."

Lady Boothby was satisfied, and left the room, rejoicing.

Strange and mingled were the feelings of Augustus, when he found himself alone with his thoughts.

"Can that lovely girl understand me. I fear not, she has not sufficient strength of mind. Can I marry one who is unable to enter into my feelings and aspirations. I fear not."

These questions and answers passed rapidly

through his brain, and he felt perplexed. But when in her presence how different were his feelings, the sweet angel face beaming with truth and purity drove away all doubts.

"She is no silly trifler, no sickly sentimentalist. Yes, she can and will love deeply and sincerely, she must be my wife."

CHAPTER VIII.

None but those who have entered upon a literary life, can understand or appreciate the glorious feelings animating the breast of an author sending forth to the world his or her first work. The young mother looks on her first-born with a sensation of delight, such as she never feels again, and so it is with the author's first bantling; his brain swells, his hot blood boils, his mind peoples an ideal world of which he is the alpha and omega. He sets at defiance the opinions of his fellow man, he scorns what he calls low ambition, and he goes on his way rejoicing in his determination to write all that is beautiful, pure and lovely, in fact to open the door of his hitherto

pent up brain, and flood the world with his noble and exalted conceptions, his chaste and delicate imaginings.

Maud Courtenay felt all these sensations. Our readers will remember that we left her smarting under the mortification inflicted by her mother's unguarded words, rousing as they did all the pride and bitterness of her daughter's nature. On that day, when her spirits were so depressed by external circumstances, a light dawned upon her, a sudden knowledge, as if by heavenly inspiration, came to her aid, and she sat alone in her chamber and commenced writing.

Maud forgot the outer world, she knew not that the little household had been wrapt in sleep, whilst she was writing page after page of the lofty imaginings that had so long filled her mind, but to which she had never dared to give utterance, the light of intellect shone brilliantly upon her countenance, and a ray of happiness, happiness the most intense, warmed, like the summer's sunshine, her innocent soul.

On and on went the pen, dotting down all Maud's thoughts and feelings, and on and on went the early hours, and it was not until the day broke and the early morning's sun shone into her room that she awoke, as it were, from the waking dream that had so taken possession of her thoughts and feelings. She hastily put away her papers and retired to bed, but not to sleep, for restored to the outer world, from which she had for hours been banished, she again thought of Cecil Woodhouse.

Some few days elapsed and Maud was sitting in her own chamber, when her mother entered.

"Maud, darling," she said, "Cecil Woodhouse is below."

"Is he?" replied the young girl, coldly.

"Yes; he says that he has come to dine with us. It is quite an event, he so rarely visits us now; put away your writing, and come down immediately."

"I will just finish what I am about," said Maud, in a calm, quiet tone, so unlike her wont

only a short time since, that Mrs. Courtenay said, angrily,

"Well, I only hope that when you do come you will conduct yourself differently to what you have lately. Your strange, frigid manner has changed Cecil, I can tell you."

Maud's lip curled, and she made no attempt to put away her writing materials, or to close the MS. which lay open before her.

Mrs. Courtenay's countenance displayed great impatience, as again she said, in a still more angry tone,

"Am I to tell Cecil you are too much engaged to come down? Really, Maud, I can't imagine what you are writing, or rather scribbling, wasting your time as well as pens and paper, to say nothing of injuring your figure and your health. Positively your face looks quite changed and careworn."

"That is not unlikely," said Maud, smiling. "I don't care much about my looks; I was never particularly handsome."

"And never likely to become so, if you sit moping over your writing all day, and I believe half the night, burning candle to no purpose. I can't imagine what all this scribbling tends to."

"It leads me out of this commonplace, every day world to dwell in one brighter and more congenial to my feelings," answered the girl, with a saddened smile. "Do you go to Mr. Woodhouse; I will follow as soon as I can put away my writing materials. Kiss me, mother dear."

In a moment the mother and daughter were locked in each others arms, fondly embracing, for in spite of the wide difference in their characters and feelings they loved each other fondly. Mrs. Courtenay possessed a kind heart, but very little mind, whilst the daughter had a towering intellect and great genius.

In a few minutes Maud entered the parlour with a calm countenance, and holding out her hand said—

"How are you, Cecil; quite well, I hope."

"Quite well, thank you, Maud."

Oh! how changed was the meeting compared with those of former days. Then a fond, earnest look of love was exchanged. Now, a cold glance. Then, an affectionate embrace and a warm clasp of the hand. Now, indifference so perceptible that to strangers it would have appeared their natural feeling.

"I cannot say I think you are looking as well as you did the last time we met," said Woodhouse.

"It's not likely she should," retorted Mrs. Courtenay. "I only wonder she has her health at all, sitting from morning till night, and half the night, too, I believe, scribbling some nonsense or other. Upon my life," continued the good lady, in a jocular tone, "I really believe she is writing a sentimental tale, about some love-sick maiden or moon-struck youth. Come, Maud, is it not so?"

A look of ineffable scorn passed over the girl's face, and Cecil Woodhouse, not noticing Maud's

countenance, followed up the light tone of Mrs. Courtenay, more to enable him to shake off the restraint andawkwardness that had prevailed than with any other motive.

"Oh! that's it, is it, Maud. Writing a novel, one that will startle the world. Come, tell us all about it. I am very partial to a good love story. It will be very romantic, I should say; the authoress only in her teens."

Maud's face and neck flushed crimson, her upper lip curled scornfully, and her eyes gleaned with pride and anger, but she uttered not a word. The thought passed like lightning through her brain—

"Does he think I am writing a silly romance, some love story as he calls it, himself the hero and I the ——. Psha! even he, then, knows me not."

And without a look she left the room, and went into the garden and walked up and down under the shade of the old lime trees, where she remained for some time unobserved by any one.

After awhile Cecil Woodhouse was seen coming from the house. He felt that in some way he had offended, and he was desirous of making reparation for any unintentional vexation he had caused her.

"Maud," said Cecil, as he came up, "will you allow me to remain with you during your walk?"

"Certainly, if you wish it," was the reply, and the indifference of the girl made the proud man wince; still he determined to persevere.

"Maud, I have offended you, how I have not the slightest notion; but believe me, if I hurt your feelings in following up your mother's speech, it was only badinage."

Maud's face was crimson, and a bitter smile curled her lip as she said,

"Indeed!"

It was now Woodhouse's turn to blush and bite his lip; he, however, conquered his rebellious pride, and continued in his former kind tone and manner—

"Why should you feel vexed, dear Maud; nay more, deeply hurt and offended. Not for an instant did I imagine your mother's playful sally and my giving a similar playful rejoinder could have given you annoyance or pain. Had I the slightest notion that there was any reality in your mother's accusation of your becoming an author, I should not have said what I unfortunately did. What, dear Maud, has caused your emotion?"

"For a few brief hours, Cecil," said Maud, in a somewhat grave tone, "I have indulged in creating for myself another world, in which for the time I could dwell in realms of beauty and love. It is true I was attempting authorship, but not in the depicting commonplace earthly beings, or, as my mother absurdly called it, scribbling a love-sick tale. That was only a repetition of what she had said when she came to inform me of your arrival, and then she roused my pride and scornful nature. But, Cecil, that you should so have misunderstood me, you who have

watched me for years; you, the only one I fondly believed who understood me, should have joined in giving heed to such an absurdity, wounded me deeply, for I felt, at the moment, that I had deceived myself in fancying that you alone, among all around, sympathised in my feelings and aspirations. Oh! never till now did I comprehend my utter loneliness in the world."

Woodhouse knew not what to say, for he certainly did not understand her. He had yet to learn how gifted was this child of genius, one whom God had endowed with a noble and poetic intellect; but she was the idol of his heart, and her scorn and coldness wrung his heart. After an effort he said—

"Hush! dear girl, do not give way to these passionate feelings and impulses; if you do they will eventually harden your heart against all softer felings, and you will then, indeed, be unhappy. Take my advice," he continued, pressing her hand in his, "and believe me that I not only can, but do sympathise in all things save your

strange words and emotion this morning. These I am unable to comprehend. Speak more openly and confide in me, dear Maud."

"Oh! Cecil, I would that I could; but I cannot. There is a sorrow at my heart you know not of, and never can. But who can expect sympathy or true happiness in a world peopled by such as she?"

Maud looked up scornfully at one of the upper windows in the house, at which Blanche Moore was seated, engaged in some fancy work.

For a minute the two walked on in silence, when she stooped and gathered a fine strawberry, and at the moment a bee lighted on her hand and sipped the sweets of the luscious fruit; having satisfied itself it flew away, but not until it had stung Maud's hand.

"There, Cecil, is a true emblem of the world!"

"My dear Maud," cried Woodhouse, "that bee has left its sting behind."

"Just like the rest of the world," she replied,

with bitterness; "they take the sweets and then neglect the giver for ever."

"You are in pain. Let us go into the house, and apply an antidote to the sting."

"Pain! Are you, too, such a stranger to the world's pain to imagine there is a remedy. Pain and I have been long associated, but not such as those around me know of. Thousands like myself pass on to the grave, and none but themselves know their own life's history."

"Maud, Maud!" said Woodhouse, kindly, "whenever you feel a bitterness of spirit coming over you, with those around you, more especially your loving mother, I implore you to set a guard upon your words, for you know not what misery you may be making for yourself, and—and others. I know you too well to judge you harshly, but there may be others who—"

"Psha!" said the girl, impatiently; "you may understand my character and some of my sentiments; but, alas! this morning has revealed to me that you cannot comprehend what is

here," and she pressed her hand to her burning brow.

Cecil's patience became exhausted, and pride gained the mastery over his gentler feelings. A strange smile curled his lip as he said:

"Maud, you are unforgiving. Remember, I spoke not words intending to hurt or wound you."

"There is nothing to forgive," she said, with assumed hauteur; in her heart she loved him, almost to madness; yet she seemed determined to banish him from her presence. "Your words and my mother's were truly beneath my contempt. I can, therefore, only pity you both."

Woodhouse could not brook this haughty reply, and he answered:

"Maud, may you never again require the warning I now give to you. I beseech you to curb your haughtiness, or one day, you will say words that will estrange you from those far dearer to you than I can ever be. Again, Maud, I say beware!

My presence seems to annoy you, therefore, I will leave you."

"Not in the slightest degree," was the curt reply. "My mother will be delighted if you wish to stay."

"Really," returned Cecil, satirically; "your invitation is so cordially expressed, that it grieves me to be compelled to decline it."

"As you please," she retorted.

"Good morning, Maud," and he extended his hand, but scarcely touched the one she as coldly held out; and, without another word, he turned and left her.

Woodhouse entered the house, took a hasty leave of the rest of the family, and walked towards his own home, his heart well nigh breaking with the intensity of its deep wretchedness. Thus was the first great barrier placed between two hearts that loved each other with no common love.

CHAPTER IX.

A TERRIBLE revulsion came over Maud's feelings when the man she so fondly loved had left her. She stood perfectly still, and putting her hand to her burning brow, mentally exclaimed—

"What have I done? Driven away the only one who could sympathise with me in my moments of unhappiness. 'Curb your tongue,' he said. Oh! that I had done so, and then he would not have left me in anger," and she silently wept.

The work of repentance had begun; she wondered not that he left her—for she knew how haughtily and cruelly she had spoken to him; and now, when it was too late, her heart filled with tenderness towards him; and, had he

been near, she would have begged him to pardon her. Then came rushing on her memory the happy days that had fled, when he would look into her eyes with tenderness and love; when he was constantly at her side, watching her every look, and anticipating her every wish. Oh! with what bitterness at her heart did she rebuke herself for her unkindness and haughty treatment.

Drying her tears, she walked to the house, intending to take refuge from her miserable feelings in the solitude of her chamber.

She had scarcely opened the door, when her mother called to her from the dining room:

"Maud, come here; I want to speak to you."

Maud, with evident annoyance on her countenance, entered the room, where she found Blanche Moore seated at her fancy work.

"Maud," continued her mother, with considerable asperity, "pray what is the cause of Cecil Woodhouse altering his mind, and leaving so abruptly?"

"He did not condescend to give me his reason," she replied, carelessly turning over the leaves of a book that lay on the table beside her.

"Maud, you know very well what has caused him to alter his mind about dining with us. It is your haughty and intolerable conduct that has driven him away. You were positively rude to him. Both Blanche and I watched your parting with him in the garden."

Maud fixed her eyes intently on Blanche, who quailed beneath their brightness, and said:

"You are perfectly at liberty, mamma, to watch all my actions; and I can well afford you the same privilege, Blanche, if it will give you the slightest amusement. Have you said all you wish to say to me, mamma? May I go?"

"Yes, go," said Mrs. Courtenay, with anger; "and try to improve your temper. It really seems as if you had lost all love for everybody—and especially for men."

Maud smiled sarcastically at these words.

Blanche left the room, and Mrs. Courtenay continued :

"Your nature seems to be totally changed—you take no interest in anything or anybody. You do not care for the innocent pleasures that other young girls delight in. I do not like to see such apathy."

"I suppose I am a philosopher in spirit, for in truth I care very little for the frivolities of this world," said Maud, with a saddened smile.

"You think a great deal too much of yourself, I can tell you. You consider yourself immensely clever."

"Yes, I am a second Sappho!" retorted Maud, an amused smile playing round her mouth.

"A philosopher and a Sappho! Positively, girl, your pedantry and your pride are intolerable. I wonder who next you will compare yourself to," cried her mother, now thoroughly angered.

"I certainly agree with that other philosopher. Anaxagoras, that the acquiring knowledge is infinitely better than worldly riches; and I also coincide with him in the conviction that a grain of wisdom is worth a thousand heaps of gold."

"Learning is all very well for men; but I wish you would not be stuffing your head with such nonsense. It would be much more to your credit and advantage instead of studying about Sapphos and philosophers, who half the world never heard of, and the other half don't care about, if you would study to be more like other girls, and make yourself agreeable. I, for one, don't know who Anaxagoras was."

"Shall I enlighten you, mamma?" said Maud, scarcely able to control breaking into a merry laugh. "Sappho was a beauty, and had great poetical talents; Anaxagoras was a philosopher, and instructed—"

"For heaven's sake, Maud, stop such nonsense! You may smile, but I see no wit or sense in—"

"No sense in Anax—"

"No, nor in you either, talking such trifling silliness. How much better it would be if you would try and make yourself happy and merry, like Blanche. Your nature seems so hardened, that I doubt if you could love."

Maud felt a strange sensation come over her as she repeated to herself her mother's last words, "your nature seems so hardened, that I doubt if you could love."

"No, mamma; I could not love, if you mean that sentimental love so common in the world. I leave that sort of tender passion to Blanche, whose heart is soft enough for any impression."

Could Mrs. Courtenay at that moment have fathomed the depths of her child's heart, she would have discovered the deep, passionate, lasting love she felt for Cecil Woodhouse, and such discovery would have prevented her ever again saying her heart was hardened.

"Go on, mamma,—pray go on," continued Maud, in answer to her mother's ill-advised

speech; "don't you think it would be as well if you set a watch over my cousin, who, I fear, has a heart nearly as soft as her head? I do not, for a moment, despise a tender heart, far from it; but there is a wide difference between maudling sentimentality and a tender heart—the first leads to every kind of evil. Of this kind is Blanche's love."

"What do you mean, Maud? Do you really think Blanche loves Willy Howard!" cried Mrs. Courtenay, in apparent alarm.

"I have not the slightest doubt that she fancies herself in what you and the world calls love with him; and I have not the slightest doubt either, that he is merely carrying on a commonplace flirtation, which, I trust, may lead to no harm. Mr. Howard is too clever and intellectual a man to think of taking such a weak girl as Blanche for a wife. I have studied his character, and whilst possessing talent, I feel certain his principles are of a very low order; I will say no more. I have had a hearty lunch, so I shall go

to my room, and you will excuse my coming down to dinner; I will join you at tea."

Maud left the room, and was soon mentally away from the cares and troubles of earth, and for hours sat writing her thoughts, till in an ideal world she bcame calm, and a high pure joy filled her heart.

Willy Howard was a friend of Robert's; they had frequently met whilst shooting or fishing. He was a young officer, whose regiment was quartered at the Bridgnorth Barracks. After a short acquaintance with Robert, Howard was invited to spend an evening at Mrs. Courtenay's house, where, after a time, he became a constant visitor. He was a handsome and well-educated young man, about six or seven and twenty years of age. His mental faculties were of a high order. His knowledge of the world extensive, and he had an inexhaustible fund of wit and humour.

These qualities made him an agreeable and pleasant companion, but though he could talk

well with clever men and women, he could likewise descend to the ordinary chit-chat of common-place women, or to the coarseness of low-minded men.

Maud discovered these qualities very soon after his introduction to her mother's house. She never liked him. There was something in his manner she felt certain was unreal. Blanche, however, had been attracted by his handsome face. Howard soon discovered that her "soft heart," as Maud called it, would take in any amount of flattery, it answered his purpose to administer large doses, and his flirtations were accepted for genuine affection; Cecil Woodhouse had only met him once.

CHAPTER X.

Two months had passed since the conversation took place recorded in our last chapter. Cecil Woodhouse had occasionally visited his cousin, and although there was no increase of cordiality exhibited between Maud and himself, the love for each other was none the less. During these months she had devoted herself, heart and mind, to her literary pursuits, much to the annoyance of Mrs. Courtenay. Maud felt that sooner or later the world would acknowledge her talent, and that she should write a book that would bring her both wealth and fame, and with this conviction she studied hard day by day. At length the work upon which she had devoted so much

thought and labour was concluded, and she sent it to an eminent West End publisher, from whom she received an acknowledgment of its receipt, written in words of great kindness and courtesy, and a promise to give the MS. speedy perusal.

Robert Courtenay had received his commission and joined his regiment, then stationed in Dublin. Blanche Moore had continued her flirtations with Robert's friend, whilst Mrs. Courtenay kept her daughter in a daily state of irritation about her scribbling, as she termed it.

One evening Maud was busy writing, when her mother entered with a rueful expression of countenance.

"Have you seen anything of Blanche?" she asked. "I cannot imagine what has become of her. She went out immediately after dinner, and it is now nearly nine o'clock, and she has not returned."

Maud's pale cheek crimsoned. She took her mother's hand, and in a kind tone said—

"Don't make yourself uneasy, mamma; I think

it not improbable she may have gone to sit with General Ryan ; I heard he was to be alone this evening."

"Do you think she is there ? I really feel very anxious."

"Suppose I put on my bonnet and shawl and go to the General's."

"I wish you would, my dear."

Maud instantly put away her writing materials, and hurried out of the house along the road leading to the General's abode. It was the month of July, and therefore quite light at eight o'clock.

Maud knocked at the door, feeling very nervous, and on its being opened went straight to the cheerful drawing room.

"My dear Maud, is that you?" said the old gentleman, rising from his seat and extending both arms to his visitor, "this is indeed a pleasure I had not anticipated ; but sit down, sit down."

"No, thank you, General." And Maud's countenance betrayed her secret misgiving about Blanche.

"Why, my dear girl, what makes you look so sad. Nothing wrong at home, I hope. Your mother's not ill?"

"No; my mother is quite well, but very anxious," replied Maud.

"Anxious about what, my dear?"

"About my cousin Blanche; she has been absent ever since dinner, and we dined early to-day. Has she been here?"

"No, my dear, she has not."

"Then you have not seen her?"

"Well, I can't exactly say that, for I saw her walking very fast down the High Street, but she was on the opposite side of the way."

"Did she not stop to speak to you?" asked Maud, earnestly.

"No; she appeared very hot, and was walking rapidly. She gave me a nod and passed on. I did not think anything of her not waiting to speak to me, for I supposed she was in a hurry to get home."

"How very strange," said Maud.

"Did she not tell her aunt where she was going?" asked the General, his countenance becoming very grave.

"No; my mother was not aware that she had left the house, nor was I until half an hour ago."

The General looked earnestly in Maud's face, whilst a shadow of anxiety seemed to pass over his own. For a moment he was silent, as if debating in his own mind how he should chose words to let Maud learn his impressions. At length he said, with great gravity—

"My dear child, I have long had my suspicions about Blanche Moore. She has appeared to me less steady than she ought to be; but—"

He paused, apparently doubtful whether he should go on.

"But what?" asked Maud.

"Well, my dear, I am not quite sure if I should be right to fill your young mind with my suspicions."

"Dear General," cried Maud, excitedly, "tell me all you know, as well as your suspicions."

"I told Blanche some short time since that I thought she was acting imprudently, carrying on such flirtations with that young Howard."

"And what did she say?"

"She was offended with me."

"I, too, warned her."

"I know you did, for she told me you had, and that she felt very indignant."

"My dear General, you have known me from childhood," said Maud, placing her hand confidingly on the old gentleman's arm, "and I am sure you know me to be incapable of doing any moral wrong. I have thought more deeply about Blanche's conduct than others suspected, and I considered it my duty to her and to my mother to give utterance to my thoughts, but the warning was unheeded by both."

"You did quite right, Maud. What were and what are your suspicions?"

"I know I may tell you, just the same as I might have told my father, had he lived, and you will judge my motives rightly."

"Yes, my child; tell me unreservedly."

"I have narrowly watched Mr. Howard, almost from the first day my brother introduced him to my mother's house. I beheld the character of the man and disliked him, although he was a great favourite with the rest of my family. I felt certain he was unprincipled, had no moral conduct, and would lead any girl astray who would listen to his fulsome flattery. I saw Blanche was pleased with his honied words and good-looking face, and from that moment I watched her, fearing her weak mind and want of firmness of character would sooner or later lead her to unhappiness. I hope, dear General, you will not think me unjust, but you wished me to be candid, and I have unburthened my mind and told you all my suspicions except one, which I pray may be unfounded."

"What is that, my love?"

"That she has eloped with Mr. Howard," said Maud, her hand grasping more nervously the General's arm.

"My dear Maud, your suspicions are precisely

my own. I have often, in secret condemned your mother for suffering Blanche to become so intimate with Howard. I am quite aware of Blanche's weakness, and I fear some great harm has befallen her."

"What is to be done?" asked Maud.

"The first step should be for us to go to your mother and relieve, as far as we are able, her anxieties."

The General rang the bell for his hat and stick, and in a minute they were on their way to Bellevue.

Maud left the General in the dining room whilst she went in search of her mother, who she found sitting in the drawing-room, her countenance showing great anxiety. The moment her daughter entered she exclaimed,

"Where is Blanche? Is she not with you?"

"No, mamma, she is not."

"Have you heard where she is?" said Mrs. Courtenay, her anxiety increasing.

"Not exactly. The fact is, mamma—it is no

use concealing anything that I or others suspect. The truth must be told. It is my firm conviction that when Blanche left our house she did so for the purpose of meeting Mr. Howard."

"Meeting Mr. Howard! For what purpose?" cried Mrs. Courtenay, in dismay.

"For what purpose I can only guess—I have no proof. You remember some time ago I warned you about the intimacy between my cousin and Mr. Howard—that warning I did not give till I had narrowly watched them, and felt the danger Blanche was running heedlessly into."

"Good gracious, Maud!" said Mrs. Courtenay, thoroughly alarmed. "You do not suppose that she is—is—"

"Disgraced," added Maud. "I fear the worst, she is so weak and frivolous."

"Poor girl! poor girl! she has such a tender heart, and—"

"Such a weak head," continued Maud.

"My dear child, what shall I do? what shall I do?"

"Come down to the dining room, where I left our excellent friend, General Ryan. He will give you better advice than I can."

Mother and daughter went to the dining room, where they found their kind sympathising old friend in anything but a cheerful frame of mind.

"Oh! General," began Mrs. Courtenay, "Maud has quite frightened me with her suspicions about Blanche Moore."

"Suspicions, I fear, that will turn out realities. Like Maud, I warned both you and Blanche of the risk she was running in flirting so shockingly with Howard."

"I know you did, but I could not believe any harm would result. Tell me, my dear friend, what steps I must take."

"You can do nothing to-night. Before breakfast in the morning I will go to the barracks and see Mr. Howard."

With this promise, Mrs. Courtenay was obliged to be content, and the General, with a warm pressure of Mrs. Courtenay's hand, and a kiss on Maud's cheek, departed.

Mrs. Courtenay retired to her bedroom in an indescribably wretched state of mind, and Maud stayed with her endeavouring by every possible affectionate attention to soothe and calm her agitation, and not until her mother sank into a deep sleep did the daughter leave her room.

Agreeably to his promise, and with the promptitude of an old soldier, early the next morning General Ryan was on his way to the barracks, which were about a mile from his residence. He knew several of the officers, and amongst the rest he was acquainted with the Colonel of the regiment in which Howard was a Lieutenant. As luck or chance would have it, he had scarcely entered the barrack-yard, when he saw his friend the Colonel coming towards him, and a minute minute after accosted him.

"Ha! General Ryan, you are early in the field this morning—the house on fire and burnt out—but how are you?"

"Quite well, thank you, Colonel."

"That's right, I am glad to see you. I am just going to breakfast—not broke your fast I hope."

"No, I have not breakfasted, I was anxious to be early at the barracks to see young Howard."

"Lieutenant Howard," said the Colonel, looking a little surprised, "didn't you know he left the barracks yesterday, on two months' leave of absence? He pressed very hard for longer grace."

"Good heavens, Colonel, you don't mean to say that he left yesterday?"

"But I do though—why, General, what's in the wind, eh?"

"Where is he gone? and what hour did he leave?" asked the General, a great deal excited.

The Colonel was astonished, but replied—

"Howard left barracks at five o'clock, and I believe he has gone into Wales to recruit his health."

"Recruit his health!" repeated the General, "much more likely to strengthen his wickedness. He is, I fear, a very bad young man."

For a minute the conversation ceased: the Colonel surprised at the excitability of the General, and the latter trying to recover from his excitement

"Come, Colonel," at length the General said, "let us go to your quarters, I want a few words in private with you."

Breakfast was on the table when the Colonel and his friend entered the room. During the meal, General Ryan gave the Colonel the history of the flirtation carried on between Blanche and young Howard. On hearing the whole of the story, and the fact of Lieutenant Howard having gone on leave, little doubt existed in the minds of either of the friends that the suspicions entertained by Maud and the General were but too likely to be true. As it was not known, however, to what part of Wales Howard was gone, there was nothing to be done but wait. So the General bid his friend good bye, and went to the Courtenays in a very uncomfortable state, vexed at being the bearer of such unsatisfactory, and as he believed, bad news.

CHAPTER XI.

FIVE weeks had elapsed since the elopement recorded in our last chapter, and the Courtenays had received no intelligence of the whereabouts of Howard or Blanche. Maud and her mother had become more affectionately attached to each other than ever, Maud doing all she could to relieve her mother's anxieties, by devoting a great portion of her time to give her pleasure, singing to her such light joyous songs as she was fond of listening to. General Ryan was an almost daily visitor, and Cecil Woodhouse an occasional one.

All the time that Maud could spare from her mother was devoted to her literary pursuits; she studied all the standard authors, ancient and

modern, and made good use of her store of knowledge in her second book, to which she had devoted a good many hours at night, determined it should be of a much higher standard than her first; and one which she fondly hoped would bring her fame as well as money.

One day General Ryan was announced, and after the usual friendly pressure of Mrs. Courtenay's hand, and the kiss on Maud's cheek, he said with a very grave countenance—

"I fear, my dear friend, our chance of finding the runaway is not any better than it has been. I have just parted from my friend the Colonel, who tells me his regiment will leave Bridgnorth next week, and that Howard has orders to join at Edinburgh; therefore he will not return here. My friend has promised to keep a sharp look out, and if he either sees or hears anything of the silly Blanche, he will immediately let me know."

Mrs. Courtenay could scarcely restrain her tears, but seeing Maud's calm look, she controlled her feelings.

It is time that we should return to our

friends in London. Augustus Boothby was as devoted to the ladies as ever, but although more than two months had elapsed, he had made no declaration of his love to Edith, who when she met his earnest gaze united to an almost affectionate manner, thought she was beloved. The London season was nearly over, when Edith received a letter from her father to say, if her kind friends would spare her, he should be glad to get her home again. Sir Harry and Lady Boothby had only the day before given orders for their departure to their country seat in Devonshire, where they usually spent the autumn and part of the winter.

The day before, or rather the evening previous to Edith's return to Bridgnorth, Sir Harry and Lady Boothby had gone to the opera, leaving Edith at home; she had been suffering nearly all day with a violent headache.

Edith was sitting in the drawing-room with a volume of poems in her hand—the work of the man she so fondly loved. Her face was very pale, and the light from the chandelier shining

on her luxuriant hair and thoughtful countenance would have rendered her a charming subject for either a poet or a painter. She sat for some time in deep thought, and then closed the volume, but still retaining it in her hand. She was startled by the entrance of Augustus Boothby, who had reached her chair before she was aware of his presence, the soft-pile carpet deadening all sound. He gazed upon her sweet face and graceful form, and at that moment almost worshipped her, so angelic did she appear in his sight.

"Mr. Boothby!" she said, her face and neck crimsoning, "I thought you had accompanied Sir Harry and Lady Boothby to the opera."

"I was there for a short time, but finding that you were not with them, I thought I should greatly prefer spending your last evening in town with you. May I ask what you are reading?"

Edith held the volume towards him, which he took from her, retaining her hand, which he felt trembled. Augustus had noticed the deep blush and the unconscious look of pleasure on

the innocent girl's countenance, and he was gratified, whilst a thrill of pleasure went straight to his heart; but how immensely was that pleasure enhanced when he found that the book she had been so intently reading was his book of poems.

"My dear Miss Ryan, you have paid me a great compliment, for I saw how intently you were reading; there is no pleasure so great to an author as to know that his writings are appreciated by those around him, and more especially by the woman he——"

The proud man checked his speech, which was hastening him on to a declaration of his love; after a moment's pause he went on.

"My dear Miss Ryan, will you honour me by accepting this volume," taking a book from his pocket. "It is similar to the one you have been reading. It will serve to keep its author in remembrance. I have spent some of the most happy hours of my life in your society, and I would not that absence should cause you to forget *me;* I never can forget you."

A lengthened pause followed this speech.

Edith was greatly embarrassed, and knew not what to say. At length, by way of breaking the painful silence, she said, taking up a volume from the table,

"Have you read this, Mr. Boothby?" handing him the book. "I have just finished it. I think it a delightful work."

"I think so too," he replied. "I read it some weeks since, when it was first published. I noticed some passages which I thought extremely beautiful. The poem is not very long, but it is vastly superior to those of much greater extent that are almost daily issuing from the press. The sentiments throughout are pure and lofty, and the scenes and characters graphically pourtrayed."

"I thought so too—the whole are so life-like."

"Too life-like," he added, in a somewhat bitter tone. "I should say the author has peered into the secret depths of thought and feeling, and has studied human nature in all its phases."

"Does the title-page give the author's name?"

"No, it only gives the initials M. C., I should imagine it to be the first work of a young and talented girl, who I feel certain, as her mind expands, and her reading becomes more enlarged, will give the world a book that will live when its author is in the grave."

"You appear to have been as much if not more interested than myself."

"I have, indeed, been more than interested. There are ideas in it which I have long cherished but never been able to express, save by the means that author has adopted. I wish I could find out who wrote the work."

Augustus had taken a seat by the table, and was, for a time, completely absorbed. Covering his face with one hand, his thoughts had wandered far away from the young girl beside him, and for a few minutes entirely forgot that she was present.

Our readers will, no doubt, have discovered, that the volume thus highly lauded, by one who was himself one of, if not the most distinguished poets of the day, was Maud Courtenay's first

work, which her publisher, instead of "running it through his magazine," had brought out in a handsome volume. The book was a great success. But we are diverging.

"What time do you leave to-morrow?" asked Augustus.

"By the earliest train," replied Edith; "the distance from town is very great, and my father does not wish me to be late in the evening."

"Then I fear I shall not have the happiness of seeing you again," said Augustus. "When and where shall we next meet?"

A deep blush suffused the girl's face, and her eyes were fast filling with tears.

"I am not quite certain," said Edith, "but I expect that I shall go to some friends in Ireland in about a month."

"How long do you remain in Ireland?" asked Mr. Boothby.

"I have not the least idea; some few weeks, I believe."

"I hope, Edith, when you return to England you will again visit my sister-in-law."

"Nothing would afford me greater pleasure. I have been so happy—I—I—"

A choking sensation in the throat prevented further words, and tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Miss Ryan," cried Augustus, "you know not what happiness your visit has afforded me. You have caused sunshine to penetrate my heart which for years has known nothing but clouds and gloom. I feel that when you are gone the light of life will go with you as far as I am concerned. I dread to think of the dreariness I shall suffer till I hear your sweet voice again, and—"

The poet stopped; he felt conscious of having uttered words that might be misinterpreted, and he was right; the poor girl thought them words of love. For some minutes a death-like silence prevailed. At length Augustus saw by the time-piece on the mantel-piece that it was nearly twelve o'clock.

"Edith," said he, taking her hand, "I have been very selfish in keeping you up so long; you will require a good night's rest to enable you to bear the fatigue of your long journey on

the morrow. Farewell, dear girl, and whenever you think of this visit, remember how much happiness you have afforded one who, a short time since, never expected to know the feeling, unmixed with bitterness, again. I shall dwell upon the happy weeks that have gone, and never cease to think of you and bless you."

He drew the weeping girl towards him, and fondly kissed her forehead; then, without another word, left the room.

As Mr. Boothby reached the hall door Sir Harry and Lady Boothby drove up.

"Oh, Augustus, is that you?" said Sir Harry. "Don't go yet."

"It is late."

"Only twelve o'clock," said Lady Boothby. "Do not leave us."

The three entered the house, Sir Harry going to the library, and Lady Boothby and Augustus to the drawing-room, which Edith had only vacated and gone to her bed room a minute or two before. Augustus was surprised at not finding her there.

"You have been with Edith all the evening?" began Lady Boothby.

"Yes, from the time I left your box."

"I thought so," continued his sister-in-law. "Time is passing rapidly, so let me ask you one question: have you made her an offer of marriage?"

"No!" he cried, with an astonished look.

"Have you not?" continued Lady Boothby, equally surprised.

"No; I have had my pride and my feelings crushed once, and I will never again subject myself to such misery, even though I lost the affection of the woman I loved."

"My dear Augustus," said Lady Boothby, in a gentle, soothing tone, "I quite understand your feelings and your wishes."

At this juncture Sir Harry entered the drawing-room, putting a stop to any further remarks on the part of Lady Boothby.

Thus it was that Augustus misled, by his words, his sister-in-law, who thought she understood him, and the clock just then striking one, Augustus bade them good night, and left the house.

CHAPTER XII.

Maud Courtenay had progressed rapidly with her second book, into which she had thrown her whole soul. She had devoted every energy of her mind, and poured forth all her heart's pathos into its composition, and she was looking forward with great pride and anxiety to the time of its publication.

Lieutenant Howard's regiment had left Bridgnorth, but no tidings of Blanche had reached her aunt. Edith Ryan had been welcomed home by her father and the Courtenays, but as yet had made no mention of Augustus Boothby beyond that of his having been a constant and welcome visitor at his brother's house.

A day or two after Edith's return, a shabby,

travel-worn, dejected-looking being entered the garden gate of Belle Vue Cottage. Maud was in the parlour reading, and her mother was in her bed-room, busily engaged writing to her son Robert. Suddenly the door was hurriedly opened, and the person who had entered the garden gate rushed forward, and threw herself into Maud's arms.

Maud, with the natural instinct of a pure mind, felt a repugnance to the guilty being who had so suddenly taken her by surprise, and somewhat roughly thrust the trembling Blanche Moore from her. Maud's face was pale with passion and pride, and indignation flashed from her dark eyes.

"Blanche Moore!" she cried, "how dare you come into this house? Who is it that you come to see or degrade with your presence?"

"Oh, Maud, Maud," sobbed the guilty Blanche, "turn me not away. I know not where else to go, or where to seek for comfort and advice. Oh, dear Maud, I am utterly wretched and miserable; pray do not spurn me."

She tried to take Maud's hand, but the girl shrank unconsciously from her touch.

"Oh, my God! have mercy upon me, have mercy upon me! for none on earth will," cried Blanche, weeping more bitterly.

Maud's heart was touched, and tears started to her eyes; but her innate pride drove them back, and whatever she might feel, she was determined the miserable girl at her feet should not see her weakness; but she took her hand in her own and then, in a softened voice, said,

"Blanche, you are cold, and I fear hungry. When had you anything to eat?"

"Not since last evening."

"Have you had nothing to-day?"

"Nothing."

"You will die from exhaustion," said Maud, her voice becoming softer and softer.

"I should be thankful if I did," replied the half-famished girl.

"Hush! hush!" said Maud, "rather pray to God that you may live to repent of your wickedness, and lead a new life."

"Oh, Maud, if you could see into my heart, how bitterly I loathe myself, and how sincerely I do repent my short career of guilt."

"Get up, Blanche, and sit on this chair," and Maud placed a chair for her.

"Thank you, dear Maud. I am so faint and tired."

"Where did you come from?"

"From Edinburgh."

"From Edinburgh! I thought so. Who took you there?"

"Lieutenant Howard."

Maud's brow contracted with a frown, but she made no remark.

"Yes, Maud, it was he who lured me from my happy home, promising to make me his wife. You can form no idea how I have suffered both in mind and body, for I soon discovered the heartlessness of the man I loved with my whole heart. From day to day he promised that we should be married, but always found an excuse for not doing so. After some weeks he began to neglect me, and a few days ago deserted me, leaving me

with only a few shillings in my pocket, barely sufficient to pay my fare by the steamer, in the most wretched fore cabin, and for the last three days I have had to walk, having subsisted only upon bread and water."

"Unfortunate girl!" exclaimed Maud; "remain quiet for a few minutes, till I go and get you something to eat."

Maud's tears, in spite of all her efforts to repress them, rolled down her cheeks, as she untied Blanche's bonnet and took off her cloak; for which kindness she was rewarded by a look of deep gratitude and affection.

Mrs. Courtenay's servant had been sent into the town to procure something for her mistress, so Maud took her place and made some tea, and toasted some bread, which, together with a new laid egg, which she boiled, she placed, neatly arranged, upon a tray, and carried into the parlour and set before the half-famished girl.

At this act of kindness Blanche attempted to speak her thanks, but tears choked her utterance, and for some minutes she cried bitterly. Maud

did not attempt to restrain the tears which she knew must flow, and remained silent. At the right moment she bade the guilty girl take her supper, whilst she left the room and went in search of Mrs. Courtenay, who was still writing in her bed room.

As Maud entered her mother left off writing, for she saw by her daughter's face that she had something of importance to communicate to her.

"Dear mamma," said the daughter, with a grave look, "I want you to come with me into the parlour."

"For what purpose, my love?"

"To grant pardon and forgiveness to one who has been very guilty and acted towards you with deep ingratitude, and who now comes with contrition and penitence to ask your forgiveness."

"What do you mean, Maud? Is—"

Mrs. Courtenay paused, and her daughter filled up the sentence.

"Is Blanche there? Yes; I came to intercede for the wretched girl."

"Blanche returned!" exclaimed Mrs. Courtenay; "thank God! thank God! Poor child! poor child! Did you not say she was in the parlour?"

"Yes; I have given her some refreshment," said Maud, calmly.

"That's right, my love. I wish Margaret had returned; the poor child will want to go to rest, and I have no bed prepared for her. What shall we do?"

Maud's brow darkened as she said, somewhat coldly,

"Margaret will, no doubt, return shortly. Come, mamma, let us go down stairs."

Mrs. Courtenay hastily left the chamber, followed by Maud. Scarcely had Mrs. Courtenay entered the parlour than Blanche rushed into her arms, sobbing almost hysterically.

"Oh! aunt, dear aunt, forgive me. I have been very wicked and very ungrateful; but I have suffered fearfully."

Mrs. Courtenay clasped the erring girl to her breast, saying—

"Blanche, I do forgive you, with my whole heart do I forgive you. I, too, have been to blame; had I attended to dear Maud's warnings this would not have occurred."

Maud, on hearing these words, quietly left the room, and Mrs. Courtenay continued—

"Thank God you are restored to me. Mine shall be in future the task to watch over and protect you."

"Oh! aunt, never again will I give you cause for uneasiness. Oh! how deeply I feel your goodness."

Maud had been in her room upwards of an hour writing, when a knock was heard at her door.

"Come in," she cried.

Mrs. Courtenay entered.

"My dear Maud," she said, "I cannot imagine what has become of Margaret, she has not yet returned; and that poor child is tired to death, and ought to go to bed, and is suffering great pain in all her limbs."

"Shall I make up the bed for her in the room she used to occupy?"

Mrs. Courtenay looked into her daughter's face with astonishment, as she thought—

"Can she be the haughty, unforgiving girl I always imagined her? There is no bitterness, no pride now."

"It seems too much to ask you, my child; but if you will take the trouble I shall be very thankful."

Maud arose, and as she came close to her mother she was most affectionately embraced. A warm tear dropped from the daughter's eye on the mother's brow. Who shall say where that tear came from, but He who reads all hearts, and from whom no secrets are hid?

Maud with alacrity made the bed, arranged the pillows, and saw the chamber neat and comfortable, and then returned to her own room, where she found her mother still sitting and weeping. Maud put her arms round her neck, and with kind words soothed her. At length she said—

"Come, my dear child, let us go to that heart-broken girl."

They went into the parlour and found Blanche on the sofa, with her eyes closed, and apparently very much exhausted, low, heavy sobs escaping her lips at intervals.

"Blanche," said Mrs. Courtenay, in a soothing tone, "you had better go to bed. Come, my dear, I will go with you."

The weary girl arose, and leaning fondly on her aunt's arm, they quitted the room.

Left alone, Maud threw herself into a chair, and burying her face in her hands, deep and bitter thoughts passed through her mind; but as the twilight darkened softer feelings took possession of her, as she remembered that week of happiness that she spent at Pentlow Hall, when she almost believed that Cecil Woodhouse returned her burning love. She thought of it now only as a dream, too bright and pure to be realised. Anon, her thoughts came rushing back to her cousin Blanche.

"Do they dare," she thought, "call such a pas-

sion as hers love? Dare they class my holy, sacred affection in the same category with the feeling yielded to by that sinful wretched girl, which feeling she calls love? No, she knew not what love is; at least, not that love which is sacred and purifying, lasting for ever, and knowing no change."

Maud retired to her chamber, feeling no inclination for supper. Margaret had returned, and Mrs. Courtenay was going to her room, but as she passed her daughter's door she opened it and said,

"Maud, my dear, will you sleep in my room to-night?"

"No, mamma; why do you ask?"

"Oh! my love, nothing particular. I only thought that perhaps you might prefer it. God bless you."

And kissing each other, mother and child parted for the night.

Maud sat writing, deeply engrossed in her subject, till the clock struck the hour of two ere she commenced undressing. Late as was the hour,

she would not forego her prayers of thankfulness to God for all His mercies of the past day. She was rising from her kneeling position and intending to extinguish her light, when sobs of deep anguish broke upon her ear. She listened for a minute or two, and the sobs were heard with greater distinctness. Maud unlocked the door which led to Blanche's chamber, and on entering found the wretched girl sitting up in bed, her face concealed by her hands, and tears of anguish fast falling down her cheeks. The moment Maud was seen Blanche exclaimed—

"Oh! Maud, I have disturbed your rest. I could not restrain my feelings, for when I awoke out of my deep sleep my life for the last few months rushed through my brain, and laid bare to me the horrid guiltiness of my soul, as well as the wickedness and ingratitude of my conduct, both to you and my dear aunt. Oh! Maud, what would I give, what would I not do, to be able to recall those sad weeks. I feel, I know that I have disgraced myself, and done all this for one base

and cowardly, utterly unworthy the name of man. Oh! dear Maud, pity and forgive me."

Maud remained calm and spoke not, but her kind heart was wrung by the wretchedness of the weak girl.

"Dear Maud, I can see you pity my wretchedness, and your reward for kindness to one so utterly beneath you will be from Him who knows all hearts."

Blanche crept closer to her cousin, and at length clasped her round the waist, and nestled her head in her bosom. It was a beautiful as well as a touching sight to look upon these two girls—the one pure and chaste as an angel in her spotless innocence, the other wretched through her guilt, yet truly penitent. The chaste one supporting, soothing, and watching over her fallen sister. The sobs of Blanche were no longer heard, the stillness which reigned around was almost death-like, and the loneliness of the hour gave solemnity to the strange scene.

At length Blanche said,

"Dearest Maud, you little know, you cannot comprehend how your great kindness comforts my poor weary heart. I feel, what I have not done through all my wretchedness for weeks, that I could pray. Oh! dear cousin, will you—will you pray with me, pray that I might die?"

"Hush, Blanche, I could not, will not pray for that. I will help you with my prayers to the all merciful and just God, that you may live—live to sincerely repent of your transgressions."

Blanche could not utter a word, and Maud continued,

"Yes, Blanche, our Heavenly Father wishes sinners to live and repent. He will call you home when He sees that you truly repent. He will give you strength to purify your soul, and enable you to lead a new life. He will pardon all your transgressions, and in His own good time give you entrance to His heavenly kingdom. So, dear girl, pray not for death, but for life, and ask His forgiveness for the past, and strength for the future."

"Maud," said Blanche, solemnly, "do you think that one so vile, as I feel I am, can be forgiven? Has not our Heavenly Father cast me off for ever?"

"No, Blanche, I am sure He has not. Do you not remember the words of our blessed Lord and Saviour to Magdalene? 'Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more.' And how often did He utter similarly consoling and comforting words, 'Repent of your sins, and they shall be forgiven you.' Can you remember these blessed promises, and not feel sure that all those who sin, be their sins ten thousand times greater than yours, will never be forsaken in their hour of need, never be abandoned by Him whose mercy and love is without end. Come, then, let us pray, for be assured He will hear and answer our prayers."

Maud dropped on her knees at the bedside, and prayed fervently. Blanche, almost for the first time in her life, responded earnestly from the very depths of her heart, for she was imploring the mercy of God for a great crime.

Some minutes they remained in prayer, then Maud arose and Blanche seized her hand, saying,

"Maud, your kindness, your goodness have given me what I never had before,—faith in the mercy of an offended God, wicked as I know I am. I know, too, that God's goodness will reward you for this night's work. Leave me, Maud, I shall not disturb you again, for you have taught me to trust where, only a short hour since, I only feared. I would ask only one more kindness; will you give me your blessing and—and a kiss. I shall be happier—so much happier; but I feel I am asking too much from one so pure and good."

"Blanche," Maud said, in a solemn voice, "Christ forgave one who had sinned even like yourself. If He forgave, how can I, a fellow sinner, withhold my blessing and forgiveness."

Maud bent her head lower and lower till her lips touched the forehead of her cousin, and kissing it she said,

"May God in His great mercy grant you pardon and peace."

Disengaging herself from Blanche's arms she went into her own room, and no sooner had she closed the door than her pent up tears flowed unrestrainedly. Could the world, as it is termed, have seen her that night how different a judgment it would have passed on her to what it did afterwards by (world like) taking outward appearances for proofs.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE next morning Maud, in spite of all she had undergone, and the broken rest she had had, was up early and commenced writing vigorously. She knew that to remain in bed and think over the scene of the past night would only make her miserable, so she wisely gave her thoughts to her book, and for a time forgot the cares of the world in the pleasure of a world of her own creation.

Blanche slept more soundly and later, and when she awoke the sun was shining brightly into her room. She did not go downstairs, for the brighter the sun shone the more gloomy became her thoughts, till she felt almost ashamed to look upon the face of nature.

As the breakfast hour drew near Maud effaced all traces of weeping from her eyes, and then

went down to the parlour, a cold expression on her features. She embraced her mother with her usual affection. Mrs. Courtenay poured out a cup of coffee and buttered some cold toast, which she carried to Blanche's room. On her return to the parlour she took her seat opposite her daughter and they commenced their morning meal.

"Mamma," began Maud, "what do you intend doing with that unhappy girl upstairs?"

"What do you mean, my dear?"

"Where do you intend to place her?" replied the daughter.

Mrs. Courtenay seemed astonished at the question, and her face flushed as she said, in a tremulous voice,

"Why, Maud, what am I to do? I cannot turn her from my door, and you know, my dear, I am too poor to pay for her maintenance elsewhere."

"I presume, then, that you intend me to understand that she is to live with us, or rather, I should say, with you."

"I must have time to consider what is to be done. I am so bewildered that I am at a loss to know what to do for the best."

Maud's pride might have been seen in her quivering lip and erect head, but she spoke not. Mrs. Courtenay saw not these indications of a proud spirit, for she did not raise her head. The daughter watched the mother attentively for some minutes, and then said,

"I have thought of a plan for you."

"What is it, my dear?" said Mrs. Courtenay, with something like animation.

"Take a couple of rooms for Blanche in some small but comfortable cottage, where a respectable woman lives, who will do all that is necessary for the poor child's comfort. We can often visit her and see that she has all she requires, and by good advice turn her thoughts from earthly things and lead her to think seriously of the world to come."

Mrs. Courtenay looked at her daughter utterly amazed and astonished.

"Well, Maud, your plan is all very well; but

where, in the name of fortune, is the money to come from to pay all the expenses attending such a plan?"

"Do you approve the suggestion?" asked Maud, not replying to her mother's question.

"What is the use of approving, when the thing cannot be carried out?"

"It can be carried out," replied Maud, "for I will find the money."

"You?" almost screamed Mrs. Courtenay.

"Yes; I."

"What money can you have?"

"Never mind what money I have, or where it comes from. Two months hence you shall know all about it."

Mrs. Courtenay mused for some moments.

"Do you approve my plan?" asked Maud, breaking the silence.

"Well, yes," answered Mrs. Courtenay, in a tone that evidently showed she did not altogether approve; "but, Maud dear, will it not seem cruel and harsh to send her out of the house? What makes you wish it?"

"I do not wish you to do anything either harsh or cruel, but I do wish that she should leave your house as soon as we can make proper arrangements for her comfort."

Mrs. Courtenay took no notice by words of her daughter's wishes, so Maud continued,

"Let me tell you at once my unchangeable determination not to live in the constant society of one who has disgraced herself and you—one who has been utterly careless of her own honour."

"But she repents—"

"Repents," interrupted Maud; "I have not the slightest doubt of that, and my heart bleeds for her. I pity her, how deeply none knows but He who knoweth the secret of all hearts. I pity her, but I cannot again make her my companion, sit beside her, walk with her, see her share your affection, in fact treat her in all respects now as I did when she was pure and free from stain. My dear mamma, I know it is our duty to do our best to protect the erring girl from further sin

and degradation, and by God's help I will be kind and compassionate to her; but it is neither right nor natural that the innocent should herd with the guilty, that the pure and impure should live together as familiar companions. But I will say no more. I have perhaps already said too much. One sinner should not sit in judgment upon another."

Mrs. Courtenay made no reply, but sat deeply thinking.

"What are you thinking about so intently, mamma?" asked Maud.

"Why, Maud, that you are of a very unforgiving temper. It grieves me that so young a girl should be so severe; your nature is, I fear, a very hard one."

Could the mother have looked into the hidden depths of her daughter's heart at that moment how different would have been her judgment. Oh! how little do we frail human beings know of each other's hearts and feelings, especially those feelings that dwell the deepest in our hearts.

"You ought not to make such harsh remarks, Maud," Mrs. Courtenay continued. "I do not like your unrelenting sternness."

The girl's lips curled bitterly, almost contemptuously, at these words; but she controlled her feelings and said quietly, yet firmly,

"Let me once more ask you, mamma. Do you or do you not approve the plan I have suggested. If you adopt it, well and good; but if you reject it, and intend keeping your guilty niece under your roof, which never before was sullied by even the presence of impurity or guilt, your child must quit it, and will be lost to you in every sense of the word."

Mrs. Courtenay started, and a look of dismay crossed her brow as she replied hurriedly,

"Why, Maud, you don't for a moment believe that I have a hundredth part of the affection for Blanche that I have for you, my darling, good child. Oh! Maud, how can you talk so calmly of separating yourself from the mother who loves you so tenderly. I don't wish to keep that erring girl here, only I cannot see where the money is to

come from to support her. Where can you possibly get money from?"

"Do not ask me, mamma. Put confidence in your child. In two months you shall know how and where the money comes from. Will you, can you repose faith in me?"

"Yes, my child, I not only can but will," was the happy reply.

Well would it be for the happiness of families if all mothers could give the same reply as truthfully and from their hearts as did Mrs. Courtenay.

With an affectionate embrace the mother and daughter separated; the mother to look after her household duties, and the daughter to put on her mantle and bonnet.

We will accompany the latter on her mission of charity.

Maud passed quickly through the streets of Bridgnorth, and was soon wending her way along the turnpike road; she continued her walk for about a quarter of an hour, and then came to a pretty green lane which was canopied by trees grow-

ing from either hedgerow. At the end of this lane she came to a more open place, a most picturesque spot it was, crossing a bridge under which a bright sparkling stream flowed, its banks covered with various trees and shrubs; and about a hundred yards from the bridge was situated a neat-looking cottage, standing in the middle of a garden, a gravel walk led to the front door, through a porch which was covered with honeysuckle, clematis, and China roses, which not merely covered the porch, but the entire front of the cottage. The garden was not only tidily kept, but was well filled with sundry beds of flowers.

Maud knocked at the door, which was opened by a most respectable looking woman, whose age might be about fifty-six or seven; she was pleasant looking, her dress extremely neat and very plain, her silver grey hair was arranged in bands under a cap white as snow; judging from her present appearance anyone could have imagined that she had been a beauty in her youthful days. The old woman greeted her visitor with evident pleasure.

"Oh, Miss Maud, this is an unexpected pleasure, come in and sit down."

"Thank you, Nelly, I am quite well," answered Maud, "I need not ask you how you are, you look the picture of health."

"Yes, quite well."

Before detailing more of the conversation between the old woman and Maud, it will be desirable to give a slight sketch of Nelly's life. Nelly had been a very attached and faithful servant in the family of the Woodhouses, and had been raised to the dignity of housekeeper just after the birth of Cecil Woodhouse, whose mother had died soon after he was born, leaving Nelly Briggs to watch over his infancy and youth. After the death of Cecil's father, who left Nelly a handsome legacy, she retired from service, and with her legacy and a tolerable sum she had saved, she bought the cottage in which she now resided; Cecil Woodhouse having settled forty pounds a year upon her for life. He also gave her a couple of cows and other live stock, and

was in every respect very generous to one whom he termed his foster-mother.

Nelly was greatly respected, and was often visited by Cecil Woodhouse as well as the Courtenays, and other friends of the Woodhouses. Nelly had of course heard of Blanche's escapade, and the suspicions that had been raised by her sudden disappearance; so Maud's task was rendered less difficult, for it is scarcely requisite to say that her present visit to Nelly was on Blanche's account; Maud related the whole tale of her cousin's guilt, wretchedness, and penitence, to which Nelly listened attentively.

"Now, Nelly," said Maud, after finishing her recital, "I came to ask if you would take the unfortunate girl under your roof?"

"Yes, Miss Maud, I will," replied Mrs. Briggs, "and what's more, I will do all in my power to make her comfortable."

"Thank you, Nelly, I have no fear of that; when once under your roof my mind will soon be quite easy about her."

"I pray God to forgive her sin and give her

grace of mind; she is very young, and Lieutenant Howard has much to answer for."

"Yes, Nelly, he has indeed; poor Blanche was more sinned against than sinning."

Maud paused for a moment or two, somewhat overcome by her feelings.

"Nelly," she said, at length, "it is right to fix the precise sum you should receive for Blanche's board and lodging."

"Well, Miss Maud, I don't like to fix any sum—what did you think of giving?"

"I thought forty pounds a year."

"Forty pounds a year!" repeated Mrs. Briggs, "that's too much."

"But, Nelly, you must remember that it's not only the board and lodging, but the trouble—"

"Oh, don't say a word about the trouble, Miss Maud, it will be quite a pleasure to me. I want something to occupy my spare time: so, if you please, we will say thirty pounds."

All Maud's persuasions would not induce the kind-hearted woman to take more than thirty pounds; so, after a little further conversation,

Maud returned home, much happier than when she left it.

She was no sooner seated in the breakfast room, where she found her mother waiting for her, than Mrs. Courtenay said—

"I couldn't think what had become of you all the morning; where have you been?"

"I went as far as Nelly Briggs' cottage, for the purpose of asking the good old woman to take charge of Blanche."

"And what did Nelly say."

"That she would not only take her, but would do all in her power to make her comfortable; I am sure she will be a great comfort to the unhappy girl."

"I am certain of Nelly's kindness, but how is she to be paid for all that she will have to do for Blanche?"

"She has agreed to take thirty pounds a year, to be paid half-yearly."

"Thirty pounds a year!" repeated Mrs. Courtenay, musingly.

"Yes, she said nothing should induce her to take more."

"I am glad you thought of Nelly Briggs, the idea never entered my head. But, my child, how will you be able to pay thirty pounds a year?"

"Mamma," said Maud, somewhat coldly, "you promised to put faith in me, and ask no questions. I have not entered into the arrangement with Nelly without giving the subject due consideration. As I told you before, in two months, or perhaps less, I will tell you all. I intend to keep my promise, and I hope you will keep yours."

Mrs. Courtenay was silenced, but she could not help thinking that her daughter's manner was cold and wanting in sympathy.

When the conversation had finished, Maud went to her own chamber without paying Blanche a visit, and having taken off her bonnet and mantle commenced writing, and remained absorbed in her subject for several hours, rejoicing after her labour of love had ceased, to find that she was drawing nigh to the end of the MS. of her second work, and she uttered a prayer of

thankfulness to her God for His merciful goodness in endowing her with intellect that would enable her not only to give so many comforts to those around her, but as she fondly hoped, pleasure to thousands of her fellow creatures who might be tempted to read her book.

During the afternoon, Mrs. Courtenay took advantage of Maud's absence to visit Blanche in her bedroom, and to tell her of all the arrangements which Maud had made for her comfort, and helped her niece to get her clothes packed ready for her departure.

The next morning a carriage drove up to Belle Vue cottage, and in a few minutes Mrs. Courtenay, Maud, and Blanche, got inside, and some boxes having been placed on the roof, the carriage drove off, and in less than an hour arrived at Nelly Briggs' pleasant-looking cottage, and all three were warmly greeted by the good old woman as they entered her comfortably arranged sitting-room, and after a few minutes, conducted by Nelly, visited the bed-room, which was the

picture of neatness as well as cleanliness, and with which all three were charmed.

After a short time spent in conversation, Mrs. Courtenay rose to take leave, and with tears in her eyes, went to Blanche and embraced her affectionately, but she could not utter a word.

Maud also kissed her cousin and bade her farewell, and was following her mother to the carriage, when Blanche seized her hand and sobbed out—

"God bless and reward you for all your kindness. Will you sometimes come and see me?"

"Yes, Blanche, I will come often, and we will read the Holy Book and pray for pardon, for we are both sinners, and I know we shall find comfort, for God never turns from the prayers of the truly penitent."

Blanche could restrain her tears no longer, and burst into an immoderate fit of crying.

"Blanche," said Maud, "do not weep so bitterly, but pray to Him, and He will, I hope and trust, forgive and bless you."

Blanche threw her arms round her cousin's neck, saying hysterically—

"Oh! Maud, dear Maud, kiss me once more before you leave."

Once more the proud girl's head was bowed, and she imprinted another kiss on Blanche's forehead, and the mother and daughter entered the carriage and drove directly home.

CHAPTER XIV.

Five weeks passed. Maud had completed her second work, and despatched the MS., which she had carefully read and revised, to her publisher, and was more than content with the advance she had made in the composition and finish. By study and reflection she was now enabled, not only to see the many faults in the style and composition of her first essay, but to correct the crudities which disfigured its pages. In fact, she now thoroughly comprehended what before she had only felt.

From day to day the young authoress looked with great anxiety for the arrival of the post, and in a fortnight, as she was sitting alone in the dining-room, the sun shining brightly through

the window, a letter bearing the London postmark was put into her hands. For a moment she kept looking, first at the postmark and then at the handwriting, which she knew was that of the publisher. She felt extremely nervous, and trembled so that she could scarcely break the seal, but when she opened the letter she could not refrain from an exclamation, for the first thing she saw was a cheque for two hundred pounds. She read the letter with avidity, and found its contents most gratifying. Mr. —— not only complimented her on the interest created and talent displayed, but hoped he might be permitted to append her name to the title page, for he felt the work was one to be appreciated by all readers of taste and experience.

Tears of gladness filled her eyes, and her first act after reading the good tidings was to go down upon her knees and utter a prayer of thankfulness to Almighty God, not only for His present gift, but one of heartfelt gratitude for His past mercies and great goodness in elevating her mind,

and enabling her to accomplish what she had done.

After a few minutes she arose, calm and self-possessed as usual. She folded the letter and put it into her pocket, but the cheque for the two hundred pounds she placed carefully in her desk. She then sat down and commenced writing, as if nothing particular had occurred, and after her usual daily task was completed, she put on her bonnet and wended her way to Nelly Briggs' cottage, which she had visited every two or three days, when the weather permitted, for the purpose of reading to, and consoling and comforting the unfortunate Blanche.

Nearly a month had passed since the arrival of the letter containing the cheque, when one morning as she was sitting and conversing with her mother, a box was brought in by the servant. Maud took it from the girl's hands.

"What is that, my dear?" asked Mrs. Courtenay.

"I shall be better able to tell you, mamma,

when I have had a peep into the interior," said Maud, the colour rising to her face.

"I hope it is something worth having," continued Mrs. Courtenay.

"I hope so, too," replied the gay girl, untying the knot.

At length the box was opened, and three handsomely-bound volumes met the eyes of both mother and daughter.

"Why they are books!" exclaimed the elder lady, with almost a look of disappointment on her face.

"Yes, they are beautifully-bound books!" cried Maud, her face lighted up with joy and animation, for she saw by the lettering on the back that it was a copy of her new work. "Should you like to see the volumes, mamma?"

"Yes, my dear; I wonder who has sent them."

Maud handed over the first volume, and watched her mother's countenance narrowly as she opened it.

No sooner had Mrs. Courtenay's eye fallen on

the words "Maud Courtenay" than the blood rushed to her face and neck, and she almost dropped the book, so great was her astonishment. She was unable to utter a word for some moments. At length, however, he said—

"My dear Maud, did my eyes deceive me, or is it really true that you are the author of this volume?"

"Quite true, dear mamma."

"Good Heavens! what a surprise. Come to my arms, dear child, that I may not only fondly embrace you, but tell you how thankful I feel to God for the great gift he has bestowed upon you."

Maud rushed into her mother's arms, and for some moments they spoke not, tears of gladness and thankfulness choked their utterance.—Mrs. Courtenay was the first to speak.

"My dear child, now I understand what induced you to go on toiling each day, and part of the night. My child! my child! Oh! how badly I behaved when I used to accuse you of scribbling nonsense. Forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive, dear mamma."

"I feel there is."

"No, there is nothing. But, dear mamma, did I not tell you that you should know all ere two months was passed, and have I not kept my word?"

"Indeed, indeed you have, and I bless you for it; but it is not right that all your hard-earned money should be spent on her," and Mrs. Courtenay's voice trembled. "No, no, this must not continue."

"Hush! dear mamma," returned Maud, "writing is not work, but my greatest pleasure, and it becomes doubly pleasing to me when I know I can spend the money I receive for some useful purpose."

"That's very good and kind to say so; but I don't think it right you should spend all you get in that way."

Maud smiled.

"Make your mind easy, dear mamma, on that point, for I shall not spend more than a sixth part of what I get on Blanche's account."

"Not a sixth part!" exclaimed Mrs. Courtenay, apparently astonished.

"No, not a sixth."

"Still, I ought to pay something towards—"

"You have too many calls upon your purse to admit of your paying any part of her board, and I am most thankful that God has given me the means."

"Oh! Maud, how good you are. My eyes are only now being opened to enable me to see how I wronged and distressed you when I used to imagine you were wasting your time in trivial things; now I trust I shall understand you better."

"Mamma," said Maud, "I do not wish you to mention the surprise you have had this morning to anyone."

"Not even to Cecil Woodhouse?"

"Not even to Cecil. I so much wish the fact to be known through my books, and that I trust will soon be, if my publisher has not formed too high an estimate of them. Above all, dear mother, don't let Cecil know that I am paying

for Blanche's support. I wish him to believe that you are paying for her."

"Oh, but that is not just to you."

"Never mind that; please keep our secret."

"Well, dear child, it shall be as you like. Now Maud, I intend to give up all work this morning, and turn to a day of pleasure in reading your novel," and she took the three volumes in her hand.

Maud gave her an affectionate look, and felt great happiness at the idea of her mother's reading her compositions. She left the room, and went on her way rejoicing.

* * * * *

It is October, and Edith Ryan is still at home with her father. She is, however, shortly to pay the promised visit to Ireland, and she does it unwillingly, for she has no desire to leave her father; but it is his express wish, and she is ever ready to obey him. Her heart would remain in England, for Augustus Boothby was ever in her thoughts; her every wish centered in

him. His last words, his last kiss, had never for a moment been forgotten; and if at times she wondered why he had not come to see her father and ask his consent to their union, she never thought of it with pain, for she put the greatest faith and trust in him, so she left England with the full conviction that, as soon as she returned to her father, Augustus would come and claim her hand.

CHAPTER XV.

When Augustus Boothby bade farewell to Edith Ryan on the night she was to leave London for Bridgnorth, he went to his house in a somewhat unhappy state of mind, and instead of retiring to bed, pondered over the events of the last few weeks with mingled feelings of pleasure and pain. He had been extremely happy in the society of Edith, and he could not help feeling conscious that he had won the affections of the pure-minded, trusting girl. He attempted to analyze his own feelings; but the attempt only proved that, although her society gave him pleasure for the time, there was no communion of souls between them; he knew that she could not appreciate his talent, and he did not love her as

he would wish to love the woman he should choose for his wife.

So, after a time he retired to rest, and tried to banish Edith from his mind; but he found that a more difficult task to accomplish than he had anticipated. For some days after Miss Ryan's departure, he felt very lonely and restless; he missed the morning rides and the evening conversations; but at length he settled down to his usual avocations in his well-stocked library, and for weeks occupied his time and the best energies of his mind to complete a new work, upon which he had been long engaged. More dim and shadowy grew the dream of happiness of the few weeks in the society of Edith Ryan, and when his mind became completely absorbed in his writing, he thought no more of her. He did not complete his book till early in October, when he left town to visit his brother at his country seat.

About the same time that Augustus Boothby went to his brother's, Mrs. Courtenay departed for Ireland, on a visit to a very old friend—a

visit she had long wished to make—as her son Robert was there with his regiment, and she had not seen him since he joined.

General Ryan's eldest daughter, who, as our readers will remember, was married almost immediately after the commencement of our story, invited Maud to stay with her during her mother's absence, which invitation she gladly accepted, feeling the absolute necessity for a change of scene, and the day after her mother left England, Maud went to her friend, who resided about twelve miles from Bridgnorth. Ellen and her husband gave her a very hearty welcome. Ellen was an amiable, kind-hearted young woman, resembling Edith in sweetness of temper, but of a more lively disposition. Maud felt her friend's liveliness had a very beneficial effect upon her own spirits, and a calm stole over her soul such as she had not felt for a very long time.

One morning, when they were at breakfast, Ellen said—

"Maud, we must have one or two excursions

to see the beauties of Cornwall. Have you ever been to the Land's End, or seen Mount's Bay?"

"No."

"I am glad of that, for you will be delighted with the grand, bold scenery at the Land's End, and if my husband has no objection, we will make our first trip there."

"Not only have I no objection," replied Mr. Raymond, "but I shall have great pleasure in escorting two such amiable ladies."

"Don't you think we should ask two or three friends to join us?" argued the wife.

"Yes, perhaps it would be desirable. Suppose we ask Cecil Woodhouse to join us; Maud will like him to come, won't you my dear?" he said, turning to her.

"Yes, I shall be glad to see him, of course," replied Maud.

"And, Ellen, there will be some one else who will be delighted to meet Cecil," said her husband, significantly.

"No doubt," smiled Ellen, "for I am sure she

is very much pleased with Woodhouse. Has she ever mentioned his name to you, Maud?"

"Who?" asked Maud, not a muscle of her face changing.

"Dora Gibson. I am much mistaken, too, if Cecil has not taken a fancy to her."

"Yes, now I remember his mentioning a young lady of that name. I think he said he met her at your house. I should like much to see her."

"Then we will ask her to join our party. Do you wish me to invite any others?" she asked, turning to her husband.

"As you please, my love; you and Maud must decide that point."

"Well, then, I should say, let us confine our party to inviting Dora and Mr. Woodhouse. What say you, Maud?"

"That I greatly prefer a small to a large party in such an excursion," returned Maud, gaily.

It was therefore arranged that, as Mr. Raymond was going into Bridgnorth, he should call at Pentlow Hall and secure Woodhouse for the following day.

"Now," said Ellen, "as my husband cannot possibly get back till the evening, suppose we go and pay a visit to Mrs. Gibson, and ask her to permit Dora to join us to-morrow; and if she will spare her to-day, we will bring her back to dine with us. I should wish you to make her acquaintance at once. So Maud, let us get our bonnets."

They left the room, Maud with a gay smile upon her face; but no sooner had she closed her chamber door than the smile vanished, and her lips became pale and compressed, as if she were suffering bodily pain.

"And is it true that the man I have loved so devotedly is to be married to another?"

This thought had never before crossed her mind, and now its probability forced itself upon her with overwhelming tenacity.

"Is it possible that the love he once bore me has for ever gone? Oh! that I had known my own heart sooner—that I had loved him ere it was too late!"

Maud pressed her burning temples with her hand; the action seemed to calm her fevered brain,

and after a moment she was apparently calm, as she continued her soliloquy.

"But does Cecil love Dora Gibson? It is, perhaps only a fanciful idea of Ellen's," and this thought allowed the smile to return to her countenance, and having put on her bonnet, she went down stairs to rejoin her friend.

The Gibsons lived in a rural spot, about a mile from the Vicarage, and a very pleasant walk Maud and her friend had, for the country around was picturesque. As they entered the gate, which opened into a pretty flower garden, they observed Mrs. Gibson sitting with some needlework in her hand at the window. She was a middle-aged lady, who, the moment she saw Ellen enter the garden, came out to meet her.

"My dear Ellen," Mrs. Gibson said, shaking her friend's hand cordially, "I am delighted to see you. Pray come into the drawing-room. I am also glad to see your young friend, although I have never had that pleasure before, nor do I know her name."

"This is Miss Courtenay, who is come to

see you and Dora. I can assure you, you will like her very much," said Ellen, smiling, pleasantly.

"I have no doubt of that," said Mrs. Gibson, cheerfully and kindly, extending her hand to Maud. "I am very glad to see you, Miss Courtenay, and hope often to have that pleasure during your stay with Ellen. Pray be seated."

"Where is Dora?" asked Mrs. Raymond.

"I really don't know; but if you will pull that bell beside you, I will send for her."

A servant speedily answered the summons.

"Where is Dora, Martha?" asked Mrs. Gibson.

"I believe in the garden, ma'am."

"Go and tell her I wish to see her."

The three ladies carried on a pleasant conversation for nearly a quarter of an hour, when the door opened, and Dora entered. She was about Maud's age: her face was remarkably pretty; her figure somewhat diminutive, which made her appear younger than she really was. She went straight up to Ellen, who after kissing her, said:

"Dora, I have brought my friend, Miss Courtenay, to see you; she is cousin of Mr. Cecil Woodhouse."

The colour mounted to the face and neck of the young girl, as she gracefully extended her hand to Maud, who beheld her with intense interest.

Mrs. Gibson and Mrs. Raymond were soon engaged in a lively conversation, discussing some new books they had lately been reading.

Maud chatted with Dora, and at a glance saw she was more intelligent than the generality of the girls she had met with.

Permission was given for Dora to return and spend the day with Ellen, as well as to join their party on the following morning. On taking leave, Mrs. Gibson said:

"I hope, Ellen, soon to have the pleasure of seeing you and your young friend again."

"We shall be very pleased to come."

The three took their leave.

Mrs. Raymond was called away several times to attend to her household duties, thus leaving

Maud and Dora to themselves. There was something in the latter that fascinated Maud, and yet if she had been asked what the power of that fascination was she could not have defined it; and in spite of the thought which crossed her mind that this girl was her rival, she almost loved her.

The conversation between them was unlike that of the vast majority who think of nothing beyond "good matches," "flirtations," "partners in the dance," and "love," as they call it. Unconsciously these two spoke their thoughts freely to each other, and the proud Maud admitted that Dora's conversation was of an exceedingly elevated character.

"My dear Dora," said Ellen, as the former was preparing to go home, "remember we start at ten o'clock, so be ready. We shall call for you soon after that hour. God bless you! Good-night. My love to your mamma."

Mrs. Raymond kissed her young friend affectionately, and then Dora passed on to Maud, who bent down her proud head and kissed the lips

upraised to her. Who can say what it was that fascinated Maud?

"Good-night, Miss Courtenay," said Dora, blushing deeply.

"Good-night, Miss Gibson," said Maud, in a strange tone. "We shall meet again to-morrow."

"Mamma," said Dora, when she got home, "I do not know what it is, or how it is, that I am so fascinated with Miss Courtenay. I positively believe I almost love her."

"Love at first sight," said Mrs. Gibson, very much astonished at her daughter's fervour, having never before heard her express an opinion of a person at first meeting, for she knew that Dora was not one of those romantic young ladies who form sudden attachments.

"Yes, mamma, she really fascinates me in a way I never was before. There is something in her countenance so intellectual; I am certain she is very clever, and her manner is so kind. Yet I cannot divest myself of the idea that she is proud. I hope I shall meet her often."

"How long is she going to stay with Ellen?"

"I don't know exactly, but I understood four weeks."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Gibson, good humouredly, "then you will have plenty of opportunities of seeing more of her fascination. So now we will retire for the night."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE party met the next morning at the time appointed. The clergyman rode his own nag, Cecil Woodhouse his splendid riding horse, and the three ladies on horses hired for the occasion, for Mr. Raymond was not rich enough to keep additional horses for his wife and friends. The "set out" was very respectable for the country, but would certainly not have passed muster in Rotten Row.

According to promise, the equestrians called for Dora Gibson, who had waited for her friends, the groom from the livery stables having brought her horse a little before the time it was ordered.

Mrs. Raymond, after the customary salutations, said:

"Mr. Woodhouse, will you dismount and assist Miss Gibson in mounting her horse?"

"With pleasure," said Cecil, getting off his horse.

"Poor Parsons can't afford to keep a groom," laughed Ellen.

At length they cantered off. Maud carefully avoided a *tête-à-tête* with Cecil Woodhouse, by riding between Ellen and her husband, leaving Dora to Cecil's charge. They rode merrily on through most delightful scenery, the road bounded by high hedges, such as are not to be seen in many of the counties in England. After about an hour's ride, they suddenly came upon an extensive moor, wild and dreary, yet gloriously beautiful and sublime. For miles the eye could see only black moorlands, intersected by narrow running streams, with here and there white chimneys denoting the vicinity of mines. This moor is bounded on the north by the British Channel, and on the south by the English Channel; on the

western side a strange, awful grandeur is presented to the eye—a vast pile of rugged rocks. You may travel for miles without encountering a living being.

The scene appeared to Maud to give a better insight into a more perceptible knowledge of God's infinite power and mighty works, than the less wild and more picturesque, quiet beauty of English scenery met with in Kent and Surrey; at least, such were Maud's thoughts, and in her it inspired deep meditation and reflection. She had, unnoticed by the rest of her party, pulled up her horse, and her friends went cantering along. She dismounted and seated herself under an immensely high and overhanging piece of rock, and in contemplating the scenery around forgot her friends, whilst her mind travelled to her home in Bridgnorth, where imagination became busily at work. As soon as her friends perceived her absence, Ellen called loudly to her, but so intently thinking was Maud that she heard not her voice.

Woodhouse turned his horse's head and rode

to the spot where she was seated; her horse stood grazing quietly by her side.

For some few moments he gazed at Maud without speaking. He then dismounted. Suddenly the girl looked up, to her amazement she beheld Cecil close to her with folded arms and regarding her earnestly; she seemed as if she had just awakened from a dream.

"Where are our friends?" she asked.

"They are at some distance, in a more cheerful spot than you have selected."

"Why are you here and alone?"

"I came to fetch you as you paid no attention to Mrs. Raymond when she called you," replied Cecil.

"Oh! have they been calling me? I did not hear them."

"You are very absent this morning."

"Thank Heaven I often am."

Woodhouse could not understand her fitful temper, as he deemed it.

"Some years hence, I should like a home on this wild moor," said Maud.

"Why a few years hence?" asked Cecil, "if you have a taste for such a dreary place, why not now?"

"Oh! no, no, no not now," cried Maud, "I should go mad. But when the dream of my present existence is over, and nothing but my name is left, when everything I love is severed from me, when I am useless and no longer wanted, then I would come and dwell in this wild nature. Of the study of *human nature* I shall be surfeited by that time. Yes, then I would come here to seek rest; but not now."

She rose from the rock, and Woodhouse, after assisting her to her saddle, remounted his horse and in a few minutes they rejoined the rest of the party. Woodhouse felt annoyed at her coldness, and above all, her haughtiness. Not a word passed between them as they rode along or when they joined the others. Maud slipped quietly from her horse and went up to Ellen, whilst Woodhouse, his pride wounded and greatly annoyed, entered, with a well acted gaiety, into an animated conversation with Dora.

After many expressions of delight at the splendour and beauty of the surrounding scenery, they took from the side saddles of the ladies a tolerable supply of sandwiches and sherry, of which they partook, before again mounting.

Dora and Maud rode side by side, and Ellen with her husband and Cecil Woodhouse, on their return home. The two girls had not gone far ere they heard the horses of their companions coming at full gallop, and in a minute the parson and his wife rode past without pulling up, and to the astonishment of the girls they saw they were riding a race. Cecil Woodhouse joined them and said—

"Ellen and her husband are off for a race."

"A race!" exclaimed Dora.

"Then I will try the paces of my horse," said Maud, "and endeavour to overtake them, I leave you, Dora, to the care of Mr. Woodhouse."

Without another word, she gave her horse a smart lash with her whip and galloped off at full speed.

"She endeavours to avoid me in every way," thought Cecil Woodhouse, "but neither she nor any other shall see how bitterly I feel her coldness," and coming close up to Dora's side, he continued aloud—

"Are you not shocked, Miss Gibson, at the mad, headlong way in which the parson and the two ladies are racing. Upon my word we are the only steady ones of the party."

Dora smiled and Cecil went on.

"We must do our best to entertain each other. Let me ask; how did you enjoy the scenery?"

"Oh! very much," replied the young girl, a blush mantling her cheek.

"Then I hope you have liked our excursion," continued Cecil.

"I have enjoyed it exceedingly. I am accustomed to the moors and wild, bold, scenery."

"The rocks are very grand, are they not?"

"Yes, but I prefer the more cultivated, home scenery of some of the western counties of England."

"I confess my taste is for the bold and rugged."

"Then you and Miss Courtenay's tastes assimilate," she said.

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, I am sure so; she is an enthusiastic lover of nature, especially nature as represented by dreary moors, expansive views, and bold, rugged rocks."

"Yes," said Woodhouse carelessly, "I think she is."

"Look, Mr. Woodhouse, how furiously she is riding."

"She is indeed. I think she will beat both the parson and his wife in the race," and he laughed, but it was not a hearty laugh.

In a few minutes they perceived that Maud had passed Ellen and her husband, and the moment after all three pulled up their horses and stopped.

Woodhouse and his companion touched their horses with the whip and hastened on towards the spot where the three racers remained. Just

as Dora's horse came up it shied at something in the road-side shewed symptoms of restiveness, and she became alarmed. Woodhouse seized the bridle and held it fast till the animal became quiet.

"What, sir!" he exclaimed, laughing and addressing the horse, "is this the way you behave to ladies? You must be taught better manners. You are not frightened now, Dora? you shall not be alarmed again, in future, I will guard you."

Maud heard the words, attaching much more importance to them than they were meant to imply, and she watched intently the effect they would have upon the person to whom they were addressed. Dora's face was suffused with blushes, and Maud thought she looked affectionately at Cecil, as he uttered the simple words, or rather what were intended to be simple, for Woodhouse guessed not their effect on either of his hearers.

"Upon my word, you are a nice man for a clergyman," said Woodhouse, laughingly.

"Well—," Mr. Raymond began.

"Well, indeed, it's anything but well. What do you think, Miss Gibson? I think it will be our duty to report this scampish young man to the bishop."

"It is a very harmless offence."

"Of course it is," said Ellen.

"Well, as I was going to say, when that informer stopped me. I don't know how much informers receive upon conviction, but—"

"I expect to receive half the penalty at the least," replied Cecil, laughing.

"I hope the Right Reverend Father," said Ellen, enjoying the badinage, "will have no mercy, but order at least twenty lashes with a strong whip."

"Yes, and I shall not stand in the way of the informer taking the whole penalty."

They all laughed merrily at the tables being turned upon Woodhouse.

"When out for a holiday," continued Ellen, "I don't see why one shouldn't enjoy himself in his own way."

"Especially as a poor parson can't afford to hire horses every day."

"Not racehorses," put in Maud.

"Yes, now I take into consideration the whole matter, I think my husband ought to be punished."

"Why so?" asked Maud.

"Why so?" repeated Ellen. "Why he has the meanness to say he won the race, though I positively reached the tree by at least half a neck."

"Yes, by whipping this wretched animal of mine on his nose to keep him back. That is not fair winning, is it, Maud?"

"Certainly not, if the absurd accusation be true," laughed Maud.

"Do you doubt my word?" asked the parson, in a mock offended manner.

"To be sure I do," continued Maud; "I am certain you did not win the race."

"There is a credible witness," cried Ellen, joyfully; "I now claim to be the winner."

"Not so," said Maud; "I beat you both by a whole length."

"True—true," cried Ellen and her husband, merrily.

"I think," said Ellen, "our racers have rested enough, so we may as well be jogging on towards the Vicarage, or we shall be late for dinner."

The whole party went off at a canter and arrived at the Vicarage in ample time for the ladies to change their dresses.

Dora wore a blue and white muslin, which was extremely becoming, and showed off her diminutive figure to the best advantage. Her black hair was arranged in a peculiar manner, well-suited to her delicate beauty, the front brought up over her small ears in short braids, and then gathered behind with the back hair into a blue and silver net, giving her a more youthful look than her age warranted.

Maud wore a pure white muslin robe, full and long, which showed her slight and rather tall figure to advantage. Her hair was artistically arranged, drawn somewhat off her fine face, displaying the somewhat massive forehead. She

wore no ornament, except a bouquet of wild heather, which she had gathered on the moor.

These two girls, nearly of the same age, presented a striking contrast. Maud was thoughtful, and mingled sorrow and bitterness were visible in her face. Dora's was not what would be termed a lively countenance. There was thought imprinted on her brow and in her dark eyes, but no sorrow rested there, only happiness and content.

"Dora, are you quite ready?" asked Maud, as soon as her toilette was completed.

"Quite," answered Dora.

"Shall we go down to the drawing-room?"

"If you please."

"We had better do so, as I much question if the gentlemen are philosophers enough to be kept waiting for their dinners without complaining."

Dora laughed, and Maud turned to leave the room.

"Pray stay one minute, Miss Courtenay," cried Dora; "I want to look at you. How sweetly pretty you look."

"Nonsense, Dora, I was always plain; never pretty, even when a child," said Maud, with a smile.

"Oh! but you are though," said Dora, with strange earnestness. "You will, perhaps, think me bold, only having made your acquaintance yesterday, but you are unlike any one I ever saw before. Your dark, mournful eyes seem to say so much. Oh! I do so love to look into them," and she spoke with all the truthfulness, innocence, and naïveté of a child.

"Look on them, child," said Maud, with a dash of the old bitterness in her tone, and for a moment her false gaiety forsook her; "look on them, child, but I fear you will see little else but sorrow and bitterness."

Maud's arm was resting on Dora's shoulder, and as she looked down she saw the violet eyes gazing at her with deep, affectionate earnestness, and the bitterness of the previous moment vanished from Maud's face instantly, and in spite of her jealous feeling she gave her companion a look of love.

How incomprehensible is the heart of man—far more that of woman; there are no fixed regulations for that, no stated number of emotions and impulses are there. To every man her heart is a complete mystery. He knows not what hidden impulses lie dormant, that may be called forth at a moment's notice, or perhaps be buried in its inmost recesses for ever.

These girls had taken a great liking to each other before they had been half an hour in each other's company, and in less than four-and-twenty hours that liking had ripened into love.

"Come, Dora, let us descend to the drawing-room, or we shall keep Ellen's dinner waiting," and hand in hand the two entered the room, where the rest of the party had assembled.

Immediately on their entrance Cecil Woodhouse went to where Ellen was seated, and holding out his hand to her said,

"I am very sorry to say I must bid you good evening."

"Oh! Mr. Woodhouse, you must not go home to-night; I have a bed ready prepared for you."

"Thank you, Mrs. Raymond, I am not prepared to remain the night with you."

"My husband will furnish you with razor and a night cap," laughed Ellen.

"The only night cap I indulge in," replied Cecil, smiling, "is a glass of grog."

"Well, that you shall have—in fact, two night caps of the same sort."

"I fear my housekeeper will sit up all night."

"Not she," said Ellen; "you must really stay, if not for our sakes, for that of your tired horse. Maud, come and try your eloquence in inducing your cousin to stay and hear some music, and not to run the risk of being taken up and fined for cruelty to animals."

"Perhaps Cecil has some pressing business," Maud coldly replied to Ellen's appeal.

"No I have not," replied Cecil, in an equally cold tone of voice. "I merely wished not to be home at a very late hour, but more especially to save Mrs. Raymond the trouble of having a bed made up for me."

"You see, Ellen," continued Maud, with an

affected gaiety, "I cannot persuade him—a wilful man will have his way."

"I don't understand how you can say that," replied Ellen, "as you have not tried to persuade Mr. Woodhouse to stay. Dora," she continued, addressing Miss Gibson, "try your persuasive powers on Mr. Woodhouse."

Dora looked affectionately at Cecil, but she feared to trust her voice to speak. Cecil saw the sweet smile that rested on her lips, and he mentally thought—

"Ah! even this girl bids me stay, she for whom I have not the slightest affection beyond the ties of friendship; whilst she whom I devotedly love turns coldly away, and would rather I should go. But I will not. She shall not imagine that I am driven hence by her coldness."

"I am afraid," said Mrs. Raymond, laughing, "I shall be obliged to plead my own cause again and urge you to stay."

"And a more powerful pleader could not be found," said Cecil, gallantly.

"Then you will stay?"

"With pleasure."

The dinner and evening passed off pleasantly enough with some of the party, with bitterness in the hearts of Maud and Cecil, although externally they appeared happy.

When the time came for Dora to go home, Cecil begged that he might have the happiness to be her escort. As he made the request he turned towards Maud and saw a scornful curl of her lip, although in her heart she felt a bitter pang. Dora was soon equipped, and Cecil Woodhouse saw her safe home. When he returned he was mortified to find that Maud had retired for the night, without waiting even to bid him good night.

CHAPTER XVII.

The autumn was gone, the month of fogs and dreariness had come, and Maud was still staying with her friends at the vicarage. It was the evening before she intended going home, for she had received a letter from her mother, telling her she should leave Ireland on the following week. Mr. Woodhouse and Dora Gibson had been invited to dinner. They had frequently met during the time Maud had been with her friends, and Dora's love strengthened for Woodhouse at every interview. There was no response in Cecil's breast, although each time he saw Dora he was fascinated by her gentleness and sweetness of manner; but he regarded her only as a dear young friend, in fact, almost a child.

A far different construction was placed upon his unrestrained and affectionate manner towards her by Maud, as well as others.

Ellen and her two young friends had left the gentlemen sitting in the dining room, and Mrs. Raymond having been called from the drawing room, Maud and Dora went into the former's snug dressing room to have a cosy chat.

Dora expressed her sorrow that Maud was to leave on the morrow.

"Oh! I hope when my mamma gets home and we are comfortably settled, you will come and see us," said Maud.

"Thank you, dear Maud, I shall be delighted to do so. You cannot think how grieved I am to part with you."

"Will you come and spend Christmas with us?"

"Gladly," said Dora, a joyous smile lighting up her countenance. "I long to see your mamma. Does she resemble you?"

A painful expression rested on Maud's countenance, as she replied, sadly—

"No, she is more amiable than I am; but she cannot understand me."

Dora gazed into Maud's mournful face, and said, earnestly—

"Can I understand you, Maud?"

"No, Dora, you cannot."

"Who does?"

"Not any one. I am alone in the world. Everyone can see my faults, but that is the extent of their knowledge."

She said this somewhat bitterly, but in a moment her mood changed, and she continued—

"Do not seek, Dora, to know me. It would be a hard, unprofitable study for one so young."

Dora looked earnestly at her companion, and replied—

"I do not—I cannot understand you, but I feel there is something in you that fascinates me, and has won my love. I know that when with you I am in the presence of a superior nature, possessing a mind such as I have never known before."

"Do not talk of me, Dora," Maud replied,

after a lengthened pause; "speak of yourself. Yours has been a happy life, you have as yet known nothing of sorrow, and I trust never may, but if possible, be still happier in the future. Your path will be through that region where harmony and peace dwell, and where the storms of this life never penetrate, which the surging billows cannot ruffle," and she put her arm round her friend's waist. "Oh! Dora, may your cup of joy be ever full."

"Maud," said the girl, blushing, "you know my heart's secret?"

"Yes; have long known it."

"That I love—"

"Cecil Woodhouse," interrupted Maud.

"I will not attempt to deny what I consider a sacred love for him."

"And he loves you."

"I think and hope he does," said Dora, in a tremulous voice.

"Think and hope he does," Maud repeated. "Has he not told you that he does?"

"Not in words," said Dora.

"He deems words unnecessary," replied Maud. "His every look, his every action tells of his love. I am sure he feels the most devoted affection for you."

"You are very, very kind, dear Maud," said Dora, after a short pause in the conversation. "Oh! so very good!"

"Not good, dear girl; I would give much to ensure your happiness and his. Dora, he is all that is good and generous; value his love, and do all in your power to make him happy. I have known him from childhood, and such a heart as he possesses is the greatest good that a pure-minded, virtuous woman can possibly desire. May Heaven bless you both!"

Dora was startled by the earnestness of Maud's manner; she looked up and observed her mournful eyes, gazing on her with fond affection, and the happy girl nestled her head on her companion's shoulder, and for a few minutes neither of them spoke. At length Maud said—

"Come, Dora, we must return to the drawing-

room, Mrs. Raymond has, no doubt; finished the little affair she had in hand."

When they entered the drawing-room, they found Cecil Woodhouse seated in an easy chair, his head resting in the palm of his hand, evidently deep in thought.

"Oh! Cecil," said Maud, assuming a gaiety she did not possess, "we have been very rude in leaving the drawing-room for such a long time."

"Not at all," said Woodhouse, in a similar strain, "I have been amusing myself in looking over Miss Gibson's music."

For the moment Maud's bitterness returned, but she overcame the feeling instantly, as she thought, "I will not bend to him again." And with an increased gaiety she said—

"I hope you have selected some song for Dora to sing."

"I have not done so; but I shall be delighted if Miss Gibson will sing something to cheer us."

"Come, Dora, my good cousin is not inclined to chat, and wishes you to sing some merry song to raise his spirits."

The latter part of the sentence was uttered in a mocking tone that Woodhouse alone noticed. He felt his pride hurt, and was almost tempted to retort, but instead, he turned to the table and took up the "Athenæum" for the previous month, which, unknown to any except Maud, contained one of their cleverly-written critiques upon her last work.

"Will you sing a duet with me, Maud?" asked Dora.

"No, sing a song."

"I am nervous."

"Well, then, we will have a duet, and by way of getting rid of our nervousness, we will forget there is any one in the room."

She glanced towards Cecil, who took no notice, but went on turning over the leaves of the "Athenæum."

"Oh! from your favourite opera, *bien.* I am ready."

The duet was charmingly sung, and Maud being considerably excited, gave unusual power to her

voice. When they had finished the duet, Maud again glanced at Cecil, who still seemed absorbed in the paper he was reading. In turning over the leaves of the "Athenæum" his eye had caught the name of Courtenay—Maud Courtenay. His attention was instantly arrested to the critique, which to his amazement, spoke of Maud Courtenay as one of the most original writers of the day. Like lightning it flashed across his mind that his joining with Maud's mother in an idle and senseless jest some months ago, was the true cause of all her coldness towards him. That at the time he had not the slightest notion of the deep and thrilling imagery that was in her mind longing to be expressed. That unlucky speech of his had been resented, and bitterness had entered her sensitive young heart. He felt for a moment the desire to ask forgiveness, but the demon pride stepped in and frustrated his good desires—with a strong effort he concealed his feelings.

"Dora," exclaimed Maud, her excitement increased by the certainty that Woodhouse was

engrossed in reading her praises, "there was really no cause for your being nervous, as Cecil, thoroughly engrossed in reading, has been really absent."

Woodhouse looked up from the paper, and turned to Maud with a sort of reverence he had never known before. He closed the "Athenæum," but made no remark.

"Well, Mr. Woodhouse," said Ellen, coming into the room, "I am quite ashamed of having been so long absent; but I hope the girls have done their best to amuse you."

"Be sure of that," said Maud, an extraordinary animation lighting up her face. "We have been singing music with words, and Cecil has been listening without ears."

She laughed a gay laugh.

"Oh! I see," said Ellen, "he has been indulging in his favourite 'Athenæum.'"

"Have you read it, Ellen?" asked Maud, carelessly.

"No, it only came last evening."

"Dora," said Maud, "Ellen will like one of your charming songs."

"Oh! yes; I shall be delighted, and will listen with ears," she laughed, turning a sly look upon Cecil.

"And so shall I," replied Woodhouse.

"Will you play the accompaniment, Maud?" asked Dora.

"Yes."

Maud sat down to the piano.

Dora had scarcely finished her song, when a servant entered to say Mrs. Gibson's footman had come for Miss Gibson, and the two girls retired to Maud's dressing-room.

"Well, dear Dora," Maud said, as she fastened a warm cloak round her, "you will come and stay with me at Christmas, will you not? By that time you will be the happiest of the happy."

Dora for a moment made no answer. A blush mantled her cheek, but at length she said, in a tone of deep earnestness—

"Maud, I trust—I pray that you may be as happy as you deserve."

A bitter smile curled Maud's lip, she adroitly turned the conversation, and they talked seriously and earnestly on other topics, until it was requisite they should part.

"Good bye, Maud," said Dora, her eyes full of tears. "I must go. Oh! how many hours of happiness you have caused me since we first became acquainted, I need not say how deeply you have taught me to love you."

"Good bye, dear Dora. One day you will be as a sister to me, not only in feeling, in that you are already, but by relationship; you know I used to call Cecil my brother."

A keen observer might have discovered a tinge of bitterness as Maud spoke these words, but she continued, in an earnest and affectionate manner—

"I shall rejoice to witness the tie that will make you both so happy. God will bless you, and give you peace and joy ever upon earth, for He knows your goodness; believe me, Dora,

you cannot love my cousin Cecil too deeply. He has a noble nature and sensitive mind. Yes, I know him well, and he deserves all the love a pure, fresh young heart, such as yours, can give."

For a minute or two a deep silence ensued, when Dora enquired in a tremulous voice—

"Maud, shall you not come here again in the spring?"

"God alone knows."

"Oh! I do so hope you will. This has been such a sweet quiet time. I shall never forget it."

"Nor shall I ever forget it," replied Maud, in a strange tone. "Do not talk, dearest, of my coming here again. I cannot tell where I may be six months hence."

"Why," said Dora, "have you any idea of leaving your present home?"

"I can scarcely tell you; but I have a presentiment some important change is at hand. I feel that I may not look forward to another quiet period such as I have lately enjoyed. It is impossible to predict what may happen ere six

months have passed; but come what may I shall always recur with pleasure to the quiet weeks which have passed in your society, dear Dora. Now, good-bye, and may God bless you and preserve you."

Maud drew her young friend to her and kissed her, at the same moment inwardly breathing a prayer for her and Cecil. Dora clung round her neck, and would not leave her till Ellen's footstep was heard approaching, then, with one fond look she unclasped her arms, and the three—for Ellen had entered the room—descended the stairs together. In a few minutes Dora had quitted the house, and Woodhouse desired Courtenay's servant to bring out his horse, as he found that it was time he also should leave.

Woodhouse longed to speak to Maud and tell how highly he thought of and appreciated her intellect, and ask forgiveness for his former insult and the blindness he had exhibited as regarded her talents, but pride held him in a firm grasp, and he would not stoop to justify himself to Maud

even then, although his love for her was rather increased than diminished by his recently discovered knowledge. He departed, cold and haughty in his manner; his lips seemed sealed and words would not come to his relief.

What evil spirit took possession of Maud that night? Surely some strange influence must have prompted both her feelings and conduct. A strange exulting joy came over her as she saw Cecil depart, for she understood his feelings.

"Ah! you know me at last, Woodhouse," she thought, "at length the truth has dawned upon you. Never again will you venture to call me a mere, wilful, simple uneducated child, the scribbler of love sick tales," and her lip curled. As these thoughts crossed her mind, there was no bitterness of feeling against Cecil, but there was that which nothing could obliterate, it was a passion strong as death. As for love, she ignored it, he was nothing to her now; she felt that he had not appreciated her, and although he might now do so, he was irrevocably lost.

The next morning, Maud took an affectionate farewell of the Raymonds, who were, in truth, sorry to part with her, and she departed from the quiet vicarage with mingled feelings of gladness and regret.

CHAPTER XVIII

THREE months have passed and February is come. Maud has published her third book, received two hundred and fifty pounds for the copyright, and the press and the public are equally loud in their praise of her great talents. Her friends are justly proud of her, but Cecil Woodhouse, though he glories in the success, and sincerely acknowledges the talent, feels that he has no hope of ever calling her his. This proud man—too proud even to bend to genius—became more wretched and low spirited, as day by day, some circumstance, trifling in itself, clearly proved that the brightest dream of his life was fast fading away, not, it is true from his memory, but from being realised. Like a leaf thrown upon the

waters, his love for Maud seemed gently floating down the tide and drifting farther and farther from his reach. He little knew how intensely he was loved, and how severe was the trial of Maud to conceal, under a cold, haughty exterior, the affection that was wearing away her very existence.

"Maud has neither voice nor look for anything or anybody; her whole soul is engrossed with her writing," Mrs. Courtenay would often say. "It is her haughty coldness that has disgusted Cecil Woodhouse, and has caused him to transfer his love to Dora Gibson."

Poor Mrs. Courtenay, how little could she fathom the depth of Maud's love, a love that knew no change. She considered it an article to be exchanged at pleasure, and an idea floated in her brain that Miss Gibson had induced Woodhouse to transfer his love from Maud to herself, by sundry little womanly arts, and in her motherly affection, she blamed her daughter for suffering such traps to succeed. She was proud of the praise Maud received for her talent, but

she would much rather have seen her married to Woodhouse, and become a frugal, steady housewife, than have attained the highest place in the ranks of literature.

Would Maud have been happy, had she become the wife of the man she so devotedly loved? Would she have been content to give up her literary pursuits, her yearning after knowledge? No, she would not, she would have been a restless, wretched woman, feeling that she was in a wrong position and leading a wrong life.

It will be remembered that Lady Boothby had known the Courtenays at Black Rock, where she had been at school. She had more than once invited Maud to go and stay with her, but from some cause Maud had always refused. Now, however, that her name had become known as the "talented authoress," Lady Boothby was more anxious than ever to introduce her school friend to the circles that always appreciate rising genius, and she wrote to Maud, asking if she could procure suitable lodgings for her at Bridgnorth, where she intended staying for a short

time, and when she left she would insist on Maud's returning to town for the season.

"Mamma," said Maud, "don't you think Lady Boothby can stay with us instead of going into lodgings?"

"Yes, my dear, by all means," replied Mrs. Courtenay; "I shall be very glad to see her."

"Then I had better write at once to her," said Maud, taking out writing materials from her desk.

A week after the fashionable and clever Lady Boothby arrived at Bellevue Cottage.

"My dear Mrs. Courtenay," said Lady Boothby, the morning after her arrival, when Maud had left the room, "how your daughter is changed. Five years have made a strange alteration. I never thought when we parted that she would have grown so handsome."

"Pray, my dear Julia," exclaimed Mrs. Courtenay, "do not put such nonsense into her head, she is vain enough already and thinks herself pretty."

"She is not pretty," said Lady Boothby; "but

there is a something in her countenance that is worth all the prettiness in the world. She has the unmistakable stamp of intellect and genius, which is far more attractive to men of refined taste than beauty of face or complexion."

"She is undoubtedly clever," said Mrs. Courtenay; "but I cannot help thinking she expresses her opinion too freely, for so young a girl, on subjects she can have had little experience in."

"My dear Mrs. Courtenay," replied Julia, "you cannot tell on what subjects she is ignorant or otherwise. How little you or any of her friends suspected that she possessed a tithe part of the extraordinary talent she has exhibited—genius both the press and the thinking public have admitted."

"That's all very true, no doubt," said Mrs. Courtenay; "but Maud talks so positively about places she never saw, just as if she had been acquainted with them all her life. Then, again, she speaks of feelings and sorrows that she has never known."

Lady Boothby smiled, as she replied:

"My dear friend, how is it possible to tell *what* her feelings are, or, perhaps, her sorrows. No one is without sorrows of some kind. My opinion is, that deep and intense thought is almost an equivalent to experience. Though we cannot know, till we have felt it, the full extent of the bitterness of affliction, in some natures there is a sort of instinctive knowledge, and these can feel with the sorrowing, and take their griefs, as it were, into their own hearts, and thus gain an insight into affliction and sorrow without having actually experienced much of it. Of such a nature is Maud. This quality does not apply to natures that are thoughtless and gay, and where no shadow has darkened the path."

"Darkened her path!" exclaimed Mrs. Courtenay; "what shadow can possibly have darkened Maud's path?"

"I don't know that such has been the case; I merely mentioned it as an instance. Who can dive into the mind of another—is not every other heart a sealed book to us?"

"I used to think I knew Maud's every

thought; but I know not what to say now. She never talked much; but I never believed she was a deep thinker—as her cousin Woodhouse calls it."

"You are mistaken, she has evidently thought much, and read much."

"No doubt; but I can't help saying that I believe she would have been much happier if she had thought more of getting a husband than of writing books. I am sure I should. She seems to have no tastes in common with other young girls."

"My dear friend," said Lady Boothby, "be thankful she is not like other girls—or at least too many of them; as regards her speaking plainly on subjects *you* fancy she knows nothing about, be assured she is no self-satisfied or opinionated simpleton, as she would be, if she spoke positively on matters in which she was uninformed. Experience is not always the origin of wisdom; and though she may as yet never have really experienced those feelings she writes of so charmingly, or seen things of which she

apparently has so good a knowledge, she can understand wholly, and in her mind's eye see."

"Yes," was Mrs. Courtenay's laconic and satisfactory answer.

Lady Boothby smiled, and seeing she could make no impression upon her friend, turned the conversation, saying—

"My dear Mrs. Courtenay, at what hour do you dine? I wish to go into Bridgnorth and see a little of the town."

"We dine at five—rather early for you who are accustomed to London fashionable hours; but having no establishment, we are obliged to rough it. I do not treat you ceremoniously."

"I am glad you do not; I should have been very sorry if you did," replied Lady Boothby, affectionately. "I shall go and prepare for my walk. Will you accompany me?"

"Will not Maud go with you?"

"No; she is writing to a friend in Cornwall, I believe, to invite her here before she goes to town with me."

"Oh, very well, my dear; I shall be happy

to go with you," and Lady Boothby left the room.

A minute after, Maud entered.

"Mamma, I am going to write to Dora Gibson, to ask her to come in a few days, for I have promised Julia to return with her when she leaves us."

"Very well, dear, ask her by all means;" and then she added, in the gravest manner imaginable, "I hope, Maud, if you do go back with Julia, you will not allow her to put any nonsensical ideas into your head. She has some very extraordinary notions, I think."

A contemptuous sneer curled Maud's lip, as she replied somewhat haughtily—

"Julia is both sensible and clever. No ideas have, as yet, been 'put' in my head by any human being, all were placed there by the Almighty God who made me—not adopted from the influence of a fellow-creature, and that *One* alone will 'put' all those that will ever enter there."

"What a strange girl she is," soliloquised

Mrs. Courtenay, as her daughter left the room; "in spite of what Julia says about her cleverness, she is very vain."

Dora Gibson was to have visited her friend Maud at Christmas; but, owing to the indisposition of her mother, she had been at that season unable to leave home. Mrs. Courtenay had never seen Dora; but she was extremely anxious to see the girl who had won Woodhouse's love from Maud for herself.

It was a bright frosty day when Dora arrived at Belle Vue Cottage. Maud ran into the hall to meet her, and embraced her most affectionately—more so than she would have done had her mother and Julia been there to witness the greeting; in a minute after, she led her into the parlour, where her mother and Lady Boothby were sitting.

"Mamma, I have brought my friend Dora in at once, to introduce her to you."

"I am glad to see you, my dear," said Mrs. Courtenay, with great kindness, as she cordially shook her hand. "You must try and make me a substitute for your, mamma, during your stay

with us, though I fear that will be rather difficult."

Dora, after replying gracefully to this kind welcome, was introduced to Lady Boothby. Luncheon was ordered in, and after an hour's cheerful conversation, Maud took her friend to a bedroom, to assist in arranging her wardrobe.

Lady Boothby had been informed by Mrs. Courtenay, not only of Dora's coming, but all particulars concerning her, the supposed attachment between her and Woodhouse not excepted. Mrs. Courtenay, however, had not mentioned her surmises relative to Cecil's having at a former period "a liking" for her daughter.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Courtenay, as Maud and Dora left the room, "what do you think of her? I think she is very pretty."

"Extremely so," replied Lady Boothby, "her eyes are beautiful; indeed, there is something very charming in the whole expression of her face, and there is thought, too, on her young brow."

"Which, my dear," interrupted Mrs.

Courtenay, rather impatiently, "do you imagine the most likely to attract admiration and love, Maud or her friend? I am thinking, you see, of your observations a day or two since, on the distinction between beauty of face and complexion, and the expression of genius, as you term it. Women are poor judges of each other's appearances, so speak as a man, Julia."

A slight, very slight sneer curled Lady Boothby's lip, as she replied, good naturedly—

"It all depends upon the taste of a man, Mrs. Courtenay; were *I* a man," she said, laughing, "Maud, with her intellectual face and deep thought in her dark eyes, would be the girl of my choice. Miss Gibson's countenance is highly intellectual; but on Maud's, there is that unmistakable, that peculiar expression, genius loves to impress on the temple wherein it dwells."

"Yet, she won his love from my Maud," were the words that fell unconsciously from Mrs. Courtenay's lips.

Lady Boothby looked up in surprise.

"Whose love?" asked Lady Boothby.

"Oh, Julia, I did not know I was speaking aloud—I hope you will not name my suspicions to Maud?"

"Whose love did Miss Gibson win from Maud?"

"Her cousin's, Cecil Woodhouse."

"Did she ever tell you she loved him?" asked Julia.

"Not exactly; but I am positive Cecil loved her, till her cold, haughty behaviour disgusted him."

"Has he made proposals of marriage to Miss Gibson?"

"Not that I know of; but I heard from Ellen Raymond, that, whilst Dora and Maud were on a visit to her last summer, he paid her great attention."

"But, my dear Mrs. Courtenay," said Lady Boothly, "what caused Maud's coldness to Mr. Woodhouse. Had he ever told his love to her?"

"Not in words, perhaps."

"Did Maud think Mr Woodhouse had wronged her?"

"Oh! no," returned Mrs. Courtenay, "she always said she loved him as a brother, until some months ago. Since then she has been silent on the subject, and whenever I have named it to her has always avoided it."

"Have you any notion what caused the coldness between them?"

"Not the slightest, unless it was a slight quarrel they had some months since. At any rate, they have never appeared the same to each other since."

"What was the origin of the quarrel?" asked Lady Boothby, who imagined she saw a little deeper into the affair than her companion did.

"I hardly know," said Mrs. Courtenay. "It was something he said about Maud's writing so much. Some joke about her writing some sentimental love-sick tale. But this you know, my dear, was before we had any idea that she could write a book. I know Maud thought he had deeply wronged and insulted her."

"I do not wonder at it," said Julia, with con-

siderable animation, "and am not surprised at the estrangement. Nothing is more bitter to a person of real genius than to be put into the same category as the flimsy writers, or rather scribblers of nonsensical tales. I suppose, however, the brilliant success of Maud's books has set all that right."

"I don't think Woodhouse has ever named the subject of her writings to her."

"Has he read them?"

"Yes, all of them; and now I remember, he did say coldly, that he thought her last book was very well written."

"Very well written," repeated Lady Boothby, a sneer curling her lip. "I hope I shall not dislike this Mr. Woodhouse; but I really shall if I find he is incapable of appreciating true talent."

A pause of a few minutes, which Mrs. Courtenay broke by saying—

"Cecil is too proud to compliment Maud on her books."

"Which Maud, I am sure, would neither like nor desire," replied Lady Boothby, warmly.

"True talent requires not praise. It carries its own reward."

"But, Maud ought not to have taken offence where none was intended. Cecil had no idea of her talent when he uttered the words."

"True, my dear, Mrs. Courtenay. Mr. Woodhouse was not aware of the fact, but your daughter was."

"But she ought not to have been so severe with Cecil."

"There, my dear Mrs. Courtenay, we differ. Maud has, I am sure, long since forgiven the affront. Does the coldness you speak of still exist between her and her cousin?"

"I cannot tell; but it is very evident that his *love* for her is gone, and given to another."

A somewhat significant smile beamed in Lady Boothby's face.

"You will not repeat our conversation to Maud on any account? Woodhouse dines with us today. I sent a note to ask him—so we shall see him and his lady-love together. No formal en-

gagement at present exists between them. Pray, Julia, do not breathe a syllable of this."

"You may rely on my discretion. I must, however, confess I am curious to see Mr. Woodhouse."

Lady Boothby had her suspicions, and was determined to watch more than one of the persons who were to meet in the evening. She felt convinced there was something beneath the surface, little understood by Mrs. Courtenay, and possibly by others.

CHAPTER XIX.

Having repeated the conversation in the parlour between Mrs. Courtenay and Lady Boothby, let us betake ourselves to Miss Gibson's bed-room, where Maud was busily engaged in arranging her friend's wardrobe.

"So you are going to London with Lady Boothby," said Dora.

"Yes," Maud replied, "she has asked me so often, and I have so constantly refused, that I must go now."

"Did you fear your visit would not be an agreeable one?"

"Oh! no, quite the contrary."

"Do you like her?"

"Not only like, but love her. She is also a great

favourite of mama. You, too, Dora, will soon be equally pleased with her. She has not only a great many very good qualities, but she possesses what few persons really have—common sense. She was at school with the Ryans, at Blackrock, where we lived at the time and saw a great deal of her. She is rather older than the Ryans, and they are a few years my seniors. I had not seen Julia for five years till she came on this visit."

"Edith Ryan is not in Bridgnorth, I believe?"

"No, she is on a visit to a relative in Ireland. She will be home next month."

"I am very anxious to see her. I have heard so much about her."

"She is a dear girl; I love her sincerely."

"I have heard that the General is an agreeable man."

"Yes, and a kind one as well. I love him as a second father."

"I know nothing of the Raymonds, beyond our amiable friend and her husband," said Dora. "So you really fancy that you will like London.

I thought you would have been the last person in the world to have left the country for the gaieties of town. You are such a true lover of nature."

"A true lover of nature I most certainly am," replied Maud, "but so far from looking forward to the approaching London season with distaste, I assure you I am anticipating it with the greatest pleasure."

"Indeed!" interrupted Dora, looking as she felt—astonished.

"You need not be astonished. I mean what I say. In the first place, Dora, I shall meet all the celebrities of the day, of all countries. I do not allude to mere men of rank and wealth, but what I infinitely prefer, men of the highest intellect—men who in time gone by I have almost worshipped; men I have thought of by day and dreamed of at night. I cannot tell you what my feelings are when I think of the realization of my brightest dreams and hopes. I anticipate unspeakable delight in my projected visit. Now, Dora, can you wonder at my wishing to go to London."

"No, Maud, I cannot, and I sincerely hope your most ardent wishes and anticipations may be fully gratified before you come back to us again."

An almost bitter smile passed over Maud's countenance.

"I do not go, as most girls of my age would, full of bright hopes and dreams of happiness. The happiness I look forward to is of a different sort. The gaieties of a London season will have little charm for me. My pleasure will be to feel a deeper and higher delight—to enable me to gain a more extended knowledge of my fellow men—to commune in reality with the most gifted ones of earth."

Maud paused, and a deep flush suffused her cheeks, as changing her grave tone to one of gaiety, she continued—

"Cecil Woodhouse is coming to dine with us this evening. What dress shall I select for you to array yourself in."

"Which you please, dear Maud," returned Dora, quietly.

"Have you seen much of my cousin lately?" she asked, observing a slight shadow pass over the countenance of her friend.

"I have not seen him very often."

"I understood he had been frequently at the Raymonds," said Maud.

"Yes, I have met him there at dinner several times; but he has only dined once or twice at our house. He was exceedingly kind during my mamma's illness."

"It would have been very unlike Cecil if he had not been so," said Maud, with considerable animation. Then, in a more subdued voice, and with something like hesitation, she continued, "Dora, has my cousin made proposals of marriage to you?"

The colour mounted to Dora's face and head as she replied—

"No, Maud, I almost begin to fear—to doubt—"

"Hush! Dora, do not say you doubt my honest-hearted, noble-minded cousin. No, no, he is incapable of deceiving any one."

"Of that, dear Maud, I am as fully convinced as you are. But—but, Maud, I fear I have deceived myself in thinking it was love that prompted him to show me such kindness, and to take such affectionate interest in all that concerned me."

"My dear Dora, I feel certain he loves you. Do not, I beseech you, give way to doubts and suspense. I know, thoroughly, his proud nature and sensitiveness. Until he is firmly convinced he possesses your love he will never ask you to marry him. He could not bear a refusal."

"Do you really think so, dear Maud?" asked her young friend.

"Yes, I am sure Cecil only waits to more clearly know your feelings towards him ere asking you to be his wife."

A sunshine of happiness spread over Dora's countenance, but no further conversation on the subject was deemed desirable.

The friends proceeded to dress for dinner, and had nearly completed their toilette, when Mrs. Courtenay entered the room.

"My dear," she said, speaking to Maud, "your cousin Cecil is come. I wish you would make as much haste as possible, and go down. It is very awkward, for neither I nor Lady Boothby have finished our toilette."

Then, turning to Dora, she added—

"And you, too, my love; go down as quickly as you can, and help Maud to entertain Mr. Woodhouse. Maud is no adept in the art of amusing gentlemen, or even making herself agreeable to them." This was said playfully.

"Oh! fie, Mrs. Courtenay."

"Besides, my dear Dora, Woodhouse asked if you had arrived. So take pity upon the forlorn man, and make all the haste you can."

This last speech of Mrs. Courtenay's fell like sweet music on Dora's ear, and she again hoped that Maud was right in her conjectures.

When the two girls entered the drawing-room Cecil Woodhouse was standing by the mantelpiece, evidently unaware of their entrance. He was reading one of the volumes of Maud's last book. His pencil was in his hand, and he either had marked,

or was in the act of marking some passage, when he was interrupted by their entrance. He put down the book quickly, but carelessly, and on raising his eyes to Maud's calm, cold face, greeted her with an air of apparent indifference. Then turning to Dora, perhaps to hide the wretchedness of his feelings, he clasped her hand warmly, and retained it in his firm grasp, for at that moment he scarcely knew what he did, and expressed great pleasure in meeting her again. Maud walked carelessly to the table and took up a book, and seating herself, opened its pages and began to read, leaving Woodhouse and Dora to enjoy a *tête-â-tête.* We have said that Cecil possessed every noble quality. His sentiments were pure and lofty, but his one great fault was, like Maud's—pride; not a mean, grovelling pride, but one that could not bend to make advances to those whose manner was cold and repellent—a pride that places a barrier between beings that would gladly sacrifice their lives for each other's happiness. Thus it was with Woodhouse and Maud —a bar had arisen between them. How neither

could tell, as is too often the case; a slight estrangement begins, and becomes increased till neither party feels inclined to ascertain the real state of affairs.

A few minutes only elapsed ere Lady Boothby and Mrs. Courtenay entered the drawing-room. Maud rose from her seat and immediately conducted the former to the *fauteuil* on which Dora was sitting; Woodhouse standing beside her.

"Lady Boothby," said Maud, gaily, "allow me to introduce you to my good cousin, Cecil Woodhouse—Cecil, Lady Boothby. Her ladyship is a valued friend, so pray make yourself agreeable to her."

This gay and careless manner succeeded in deceiving Lady Boothby, as well as everybody else. Conversation was kept up with animation till dinner was announced, and they proceeded to the dining-room.

On re-assembling in the drawing-room Lady Boothby and Maud were separated from the rest.

"Maud," said Lady Boothby, in a whisper,

"sing me a song; I want to indulge in studying the countenances of those two strange faces."

"Hush, Julia," returned Maud, smiling, "I must ask Dora to sing. Her voice must be clearer than mine is to-night, and here is one, too, who would like to hear her."

There was a slight bitterness in her words, which, slight as it was, did not escape the quick ear of her companion.

Maud, observing the earnest glance fixed upon her, recollected herself instantly, and fearing she had betrayed what she was most anxious to hide, she assumed a gaiety which, from excitement and habit, was natural and easy to her.

"My dear Julia, do you really wish me to sing?"

"Certainly, Maud," replied her ladyship.

"Then I will do my best, and at the same time give you an opportunity of practising your favourite study of physiognomy. By the bye, I just remember a song that I will sing. Will you give me your candid opinion of it?"

"Most assuredly I will."

Maud moved to the piano and commenced a brilliant prelude, and, when the attention of the party was aroused began her song in a low and plaintive key, then it rose to the higher notes, but still in the same strangely melancholy strain. Suddenly the melody changed to one of wild gaiety—a sort of reckless, merry lay. Then again it changed to a sorrowful air, like the troubled waves, mourning sadly, as they break on the wild sea shore. The song was finished amidst a profound silence, so wrapt had become the listeners, and rising from the piano, she returned to the side of Lady Boothby, saying, gaily—

"How do you like my song? Remember, you promised to give me your truthful and candid opinion."

"And I will adhere faithfully to my promise," said Lady Boothby. "It is so beautiful that I cannot find words to express how highly I appreciate it. Do you not think it an exquisite composition, Mr. Woodhouse?"

"I quite agree with your ladyship," replied

Cecil. "It is not only touchingly plaintive, but strangely, I may I think call it, grandly wild. The words, too, are equally grand and beautiful."

"That wild, gay part seems like some restless spirit," said Lady Boothby, "mad from excess of sorrow."

"The subsiding into the plaintive gives a beautiful idea of the return to reason, when the wild spirit has subdued its first deep grief," remarked Woodhouse.

"Yes, the song must have been written by one who has drunk deeply from the cup of sorrow. Whose is it, Maud?" asked Lady Boothby

"It was written by your humble servant," replied Maud, gaily. "I don't think I look particularly sorrowful, do I?"

There was more than one eye fixed searchingly upon her as she spoke, for there was an expression in her countenance that belied her words and manner, but she continued in the same light style—

"Your opinion is very flattering, much more so than the song deserves, I fear. Still, I am truly gratified by your approval."

"Did you indeed write the melody as well as the words? I was on the point of asking you if it was not one of ———'s, whose music ranks highest in the profession. Dear Maud, we have very much to be proud of in you. I heartily congratulate you!"

"And permit me to offer my congratulations, Maud," said Woodhouse, almost coldly. "Your song is indeed an exquisite composition."

"Thank you, Cecil," said Maud, gaily, and gracefully bowing.

Dora uttered not a word, but took Maud's hand and silently raised it to her lips.

At this moment Mrs. Courtenay returned to the drawing-room, and was immediately congratulated by Lady Boothby on this new effort of her daughter's genius, of which her mother expressed herself proud. A something in Maud's heart caused her to rejoice, for she felt that she had given another proof of her intellect to Woodhouse.

CHAPTER XX.

"My dear Julia," said Mrs. Courtenay, the next morning, as she and Lady Boothby sat in the drawing-room, "What is your opinion? Do you think Woodhouse and Dora are attached to each other?"

"Miss Gibson is unquestionably attached to Mr. Woodhouse," Lady Boothby replied.

"Yes, of that I have do doubt," observed Mrs. Courtenay; "but don't you think he is equally attached to Dora?"

"I think he likes her. I cannot quite understand his character. Is he not very proud?" asked Lady Boothby.

"He is," said Mrs. Courtenay; "nothing could be more marked than his attentions to Dora

last evening. It reminded me of the time when he was equally attentive to Maud."

Lady Boothby looked up quickly and asked—

"Oh! you think he loved Maud once?"

"I have not the slightest doubt he did; but when she began writing her books she became cold to him, and when I spoke to her about him she was very angry. Her haughtiness disgusted him."

"They are both proud—very proud," said Lady Boothby, musingly.

Mrs. Courtenay took no notice of her companion's words, and continued—

"I don't think he cares a straw for Maud now; he is too much engrossed by Miss Gibson."

"I differ from you," said Lady Boothby. "I cannot tell whether his love for Maud was deep; if not he will soon find a balm for his wounded heart in Miss Gibson's society. But if that love was sincere, he can not so easily transfer it from one woman to another. If I may presume to judge him by his countenance, he is not the man to do so."

"I must confess," said Mrs. Courtenay, "I never could exactly understand Woodhouse."

A slight smile played round Julia's mouth as she said—

"I should fancy him a man difficult to understand."

"Do you think, then, dear Julia, that he still loves Maud?" asked Mrs. Courtenay, somewhat nervously.

"I cannot presume to say, as I was not here when you considered he was attached to Maud. But I am of opinion that his love for Miss Gibson is not very deep, if he has any love for her at all."

"Then how do you account for his great and marked attention to her last evening?" said Mrs. Courtenay, anxiously.

"I think he is attracted by her pretty face, her gentle manner, and extreme amiability, as well as her pleasing conversation. In time he might learn to love her. Perhaps at present he contrasts Maud's haughtiness and perfect indifference with Miss Gibson's gentleness and kindness. I observed him closely last evening."

"Hush! they are coming," said Mrs. Courtenay; "mind, Julia, not a word of this conversation to Maud."

At that moment Maud and Dora entered the room, just returned from their walk.

* * * * * *

Time sped quickly, and Lady Boothby's visit was drawing to a close. It was the month of March, and winter was giving place to spring. The snow had disappeared from the earth, and primroses and violets began to deck the hedges, where birds carolled blithely.

Woodhouse had been asked frequently to dine and spend the evening, either by Mrs. Courtenay or Maud, for the sake of giving Dora an opportunity of seeing him during her visit. These visits, however, were anything but agreeable to Cecil, but he did not like to refuse, though every hour some trifling affair arose, or some word was spoken which seemed to show more clearly how the distance between himself and Maud was widening. He was pleased with Dora's society,

and was always polite and attentive to her, but he had no idea he had won her affection. Nor did he for a moment think that his kindness to Dora had induced others to believe he had any deeper regard for her than that of a friend.

Two days before Lady Boothby and Maud were to leave Bridgnorth, Mrs. Courtenay was sitting alone with Maud in the parlour, the latter busily engaged in arranging her writing-desk for packing.

"I hope, Maud," said the mother, "you will not allow any nonsense to be instilled into your mind by those great people you will meet with in London. Remember, too, all men are not like Cecil Woodhouse."

"Oh! do not fear, mamma; I am only going to take a bird's-eye view of the great world, and enjoy the luxury, at least I hope so, of conversing with my own people; many of them are well known to me."

"Upon my word, Maud," cried her mother, who did not comprehend her daughter's words, "you have the most absurd ideas running in that

head of yours. I suppose when you come back you will not know how to be civil to your acquaintances in Bridgnorth. As to Cecil Woodhouse, I fancy you will scarcely acknowledge him. You only condescend to speak to him now."

"My dearest mother, do not worry yourself on my account."

"How can I do otherwise, my child, when I hear you talk about 'your people,' as you call my Lord this and my Lady that?"

"So you really imagine my people are mere lords and ladies. If so you are mistaken; my people are confined to no particular class. No doubt some will be found in the higher classes, but others will inhabit the humblest cottages. Oh! mamma, do not fancy that those wearing coronets are the only people that will dazzle my eyes. No, I hope to find some possessing the glorious coronet God hath given them, for companionship. Fear not, dear mamma, that when I return to Bridgnorth I shall love you less." And Maud laid

her head upon her mother's breast, saying, "Kiss me, mother dear."

"My child," sobbed Mrs. Courtenay, "though you may have to pass through many trials, I believe you will return to me my own loving child, as now. I have perfect faith in you; may God in his mercy watch over you."

Both mother and child mingled their tears with each other, and for some minutes not a word was spoken. At length, however, they were aroused by hearing a step approaching, and the next minute Cecil Woodhouse entered the room. Maud lifted her head from her mother's shoulder in an instant, dashed the tears from her eyes, and as instantly her assumed manner returned to her, for she felt that she must act, and said gaily—

"Ha! Cecil, you have interrupted an interesting little scene. My mother is afraid my poor inexperienced eyes will be dazzled by the gay people that will pass before them. I have assured her there is no danger, and I believe she is more reconciled. I will go and send Dora to fill my

place here, for I have a thousand and one things to do this morning. You will, I know, kindly excuse me."

These words were spoken in delicate irony, although in Maud's natural tone, and they stung the proud man.

"Yes," he thought, "she avoids me in every way. Well, as she pleases. At any rate she shall not see that I care for her departure."

And he replied, aloud and carelessly—

"Oh! certainly. Pray do not let me detain you a single instant."

As Woodhouse spoke Miss Gibson entered the room, and poor Cecil flew to her side for relief from his wretched thoughts, and again her sweet gentleness soothed his wounded heart.

Maud had just time to witness the warm and affectionate greeting with which Woodhouse met Dora, and then left the room.

* * * * * *

Two days before the intended departure of

Lady Boothby and Maud from Bridgnorth, they went to call on Edith Ryan, who had arrived from Ireland the previous evening. They found her seated beside her father, telling him all that had happened during her long absence. There was a deep shade of pensiveness on her beautiful countenance; it was not sorrow, neither was there any appearance of grief or sadness in her eyes, but she looked as though one absorbing thought occupied her whole mind and filled her whole soul. Her love for Augustus Boothby had strengthened by absence from him. She believed when they parted in London that he loved her, in the purity of her heart she believed he did so still, and attributed his neglect in not writing to her to some good and sufficient motive. It is impossible to describe the perfect trust and confidence she placed in him. Lady Boothby, too, thought her brother-in-law loved Edith, and was only waiting a favourable opportunity for seeking General Ryan and asking his consent for Edith to become his wife, and that he wished to test her affection by allowing a long time to

elapse before declaring his love for her; for Lady Boothby knew that his proud spirit would not brook a second mortification, such as he had once experienced, and the remembrance of which still rankled in his bosom. A couple of hours was passed pleasantly by the party assembled, the General forming one of the most cheerful and striking of the group.

"Well, dear Edith," said Lady Boothby, as they rose for leave taking, "I hope, after the season, you will come to stay with us at our place in the country. Sir Harry and Augustus will be delighted to meet you again."

A faint beautiful blush rose to Edith's cheek, and her lovely eyes seemed to pour forth a stream of sunshine, so truly happy did she feel at that moment.

"Ah! yes," she thought, "he will be glad to see me again, for he told me he should the night before we parted. I am sure he is true. I know he loves me."

What differently constituted minds were

Edith's, Maud's, and Dora's. In the strict sense of the word Edith's was the most amiable disposition—forgiving, patient, and long suffering; she would bear much for any one, but for those she loved she would suffer to any extent without a murmur; but there was an absence of strength in her character, and very little firmness, save in her love for her earthly idol, whom she almost worshipped in place of her God. How different was Maud's nature. She was decidedly not so amiable as Edith, but she had had much more to try her temper. No one seemed to understand or sympathise with her. None knew how deeply she had studied life, and even its bitterness, and there were but few who set so high a value on, and appreciated so completely the glorious works of God. Natural beauties of every description she adored, and with all her faults she had a high appreciation of true religion. To her Creator alone she looked for consolation and support in all her difficulties, and always prayed to Him for guidance. She loved Cecil

Woodhouse as deeply and as intensely as Edith loved Augustus Boothby, but she worshipped him not, nor allowed his image to be enshrined in that heart, which God alone should occupy.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE day previous to that fixed for Lady Boothby and Maud to leave Bridgnorth, the latter was in her bedroom, putting on her bonnet and shawl, when Dora Gibson entered.

"Are you going for a walk, dear Maud?" asked Dora.

"Yes, but I shall not be very long absent," Maud replied.

"I hope I may accompany you. This is the last day I shall have for enjoying your society; do let me go."

"My dear Dora," said Maud, somewhat gravely, "I am going where you must not follow me. I shall not be very long absent, but when

I get back we will have a cosy *tête-â-tête* here till dinner time."

Dora looked up in astonishment. Where could Maud be going that she could not accompany her and she asked with great naïveté—

"Where are you going, Maud? Why should it be more improper for me to go than for you? I am sure you would not go to any place it is improper that you should."

"No, Dora, certainly not, that is to say to any place I should consider wrong. The world possibly might be of a different opinion, but to me the world's opinion is of very little importance. As yet I am not the victim of conventionalities and absurd usages; I might say heartless usages, staking my happiness or limiting my opinion and actions to the praises or censures of my fellow creatures. But, Dora," she continued in a more sad tone, "have you never heard the sad story of my wretched cousin Blanche. She is—ah! I see, I need not say more, you understand me. Poor girl she is very penitent for her great offence. I often visit her, and I pity her from the

very depths of my heart. But it is not fitting that you should go."

"I would not intrude, it is not requisite, nor would it be delicate," said Dora gravely, "but I do not see why it should be less fitting for me than for you."

"Because, my dear Dora," replied Maud, "you will soon belong to another, and I would not that Woodhouse's bride should ever look upon aught but what is pure and holy. I belong to no one, and rejoice if I can in some measure comfort this poor girl by reading to her God's word and telling her of His mercy."

Dora was silent for a moment, and then said meekly,

"But Maud dear, Mr. Woodhouse has never told me he loves me, or asked me to be his wife. Why, then do you say I belong to another."

"Because, Dora, soon, very soon I am sure you will," and Maud stooped and kissed her friend's brow, and then hurried from the room.

It was a bright, sunny morning, such as is frequently seen in March; the wind was high and

cold, and whistled dismally through the branches of the yet leafless trees, but Maud heeded neither the sunshine nor the cold wind, her thoughts were occupied by other matters. She was not long in reaching Nelly Briggs' cottage, and after a few kind words, ascended to Blanche's sitting-room. Her cousin was seated at the window working, an expression of settled sorrow on her countenance, totally different to the wild, passionate grief that was there three months before. Maud frequently visited her, and had brought her ill-regulated mind to a better state, had taught her to know God the Father, where before she had only seen God the Avenger.

"Well, Blanche," said Maud, after affectionately embracing her cousin, "I am come to pay you my farewell visit ere I go to London."

"When do you go?"

"To-morrow. Can I do anything for you before I leave?"

"No thank you, my good, kind, best of friends," said Blanche, tears filling her eyes. "May God

preserve you from all danger and vouchsafe to you that peace and happiness you so richly deserve!"

"Thank you, Blanche, for your good wishes. I put implicit trust in God's goodness to guide me through every difficulty that I may henceforth have to encounter. But, Blanche, do not say I deserve happiness; I would not have you think me better than I am. My heart is passionate and my spirit full of bitterness, and only One knows my strange, wild nature."

"Maud," said her cousin, in a low, sad voice, "speak not thus to me, degraded, lost and fallen as I am—"

Maud interrupted her.

"Don't say lost. Does not the Bible tell us that they shall be forgiven who repent of their sins, and have you not shed many tears of repentance? Why then despair. Remember, dear cousin, the love of God is never ending and there is rejoicing among the angels of Heaven over one sinner that repenteth."

This girl, whose trust and faith in her God was

so great, read and talked to her fallen cousin, whose spirit became calm, and hope and peace again reigned in her poor stricken heart.

"Blanche," said Maud, as she rose to depart, "I must leave you now, I shall be away some weeks; but I will frequently write to you, and I hope you will write to me. Let this book," touching the Bible as she spoke, "be your guide and your comfort, and pray constantly and fervently to the God of love and mercy, that He may shed His Grace over you. If asked with humility and truth He will support, protect and watch over you. Good-bye," and kissing the forehead of the penitent girl, Maud left the room. She went to the kitchen to speak to Nelly. She was not there, but a stranger, a visitor to Nelly was seated by the fire, who rose respectfully as Maud entered.

"Where is Nelly Briggs, my good woman?" asked Maud.

"She is just gone to show the poultry to a gentleman, who has called to see her. I don't

know what the gentleman's name is; but shall I call her, Miss?"

"Thank you," said Maud, "I shall be much obliged if you will take that trouble. I am going away to-morrow, and shall not see Nelly again for some time, and I wish to speak to her before I go."

"I'll call her, Miss," said the woman, and in an instant she had left the kitchen and was pacing the garden in search of Nelly Briggs, who in a few minutes entered the cottage followed by Cecil Woodhouse. Maud started, but her surprise did not equal Cecil's, who knew not that she had ever visited the fallen Blanche, towards whom he had always thought her stern and hard. He had no idea that Maud, by her pen, was supporting her unhappy cousin, or that by her kindness and wise and gentle teaching she had taught the penitent girl to hope for mercy from the Throne of Grace. Mr. Woodhouse only saw Maud, cold and haughty, or wrapped in deep thought. Thus, it was, she was misunderstood. She held out her

hand to her cousin, and after a few formal words turned to Nelly Briggs, saying,

"Nelly, I want to speak to you for two or three minutes alone. I leave Bridgnorth, for London, to-morrow."

Nelly begged Maud to go with her into a small room off the kitchen; as they were leaving, Woodhouse said,

"Maud, I dine with your mother to-day, and am going direct there, I shall be happy to walk back with you; as it is getting late and these lanes are somewhat lonely, you will perhaps avail yourself of my protection."

"Thank you," Maud replied, "I shall be very glad. I will not detain you long."

In less than a quarter of an hour Maud and Nelly returned to the kitchen, and the former told Cecil she was ready to start.

"Good-bye, Nelly," Maud said, shaking the worthy woman warmly by the hand, "you will, I am sure, attend strictly to all I have told you."

"Yes, Miss Maud, you may depend upon my

taking as much care of the poor young lady as if she was my own child."

"I am sure you will, Nelly," returned Maud, "so good-bye, and God bless you."

"God bless you, too, dear Miss Maud," said Nelly, her eyes filling with tears, "may He have you in His safe keeping and reward you for your great goodness to the poor soul above. I wish all the world was as kind and forgiving as you are."

"Hush! hush! Nelly, not another word," said Maud.

Woodhouse had heard every syllable, although the conversation had been carried on in an undertone. He, however, gave no sign of having listened to Maud and Nelly, but felt grieved he had so unjustly misjudged his cousin.

"I am quite ready, Cecil," said Maud lightly, and they left the cottage.

"Those thick clouds portend a coming storm," observed Cecil.

"I fear so," replied his companion, "the wind is very high and very cold."

"Yes, you had better take my arm," these words were spoken in a kinder tone than usual.

"Thank you," answered Maud, taking the offered arm, and they walked on in silence, which was at length broken by Woodhouse saying—

"You leave Bridgnorth to-morrow. I may not have another opportunity of speaking to you. Oh! Maud, how I have misunderstood and wronged you with regard to that poor, unhappy cousin of yours. I deemed you stern, harsh, and unforgiving, instead of which, I find you have been her guide, her comfort, her guardian. Maud, you have taught me a lesson. It is hard for my proud, unbending spirit to have to ask for forgiveness; but, still, a better pride tells me that I am bound to acknowledge the wrong I have done you. Can you—will you forgive me?"

Woodhouse had spoken quickly, and was much agitated. Maud raised her eyes and as she gazed into his clear, blue eyes, she felt all her ardent love for him struggling to gain the mastery in her breast. She could bear his coldness and his

haughtiness, but his gentle kindness almost overpowered her. Her great difficulty at the present moment was, to be kind without showing how deeply she loved him. She gently pressed his arm saying—

"Cecil, believe me, there is nothing to forgive. You judged me as all others do, by appearances."

"Thank you, Maud, for your kindness," said Woodhouse gravely, and no more was said on the subject.

"To-morrow," Cecil observed, after walking some distance in silence, "you go to receive the homage that your talents deserve and demand, and to enter upon a more befitting life; may you find both glory and happiness."

A bitter smile rested on Maud's lip, as she replied—

"Happiness! That's a rare exotic, seen only from a distance in the warm and genial climes of the ideal. It withers and dies in the cold world of reality. Happiness reminds me of the beautiful hedge-row flowers of Devon, glorying

in the bright sunshine. Pluck them their beauty fades away, and they wither and die. Happiness! I never possessed it but once, and then it was bright and fleeting as a sunbeam."

"Maud, Maud, why gaze only on the dark side of nature?" Cecil urged. "Look forward to brighter scenes and persons more congenial to your nature."

"Amongst those with whom I am about to associate, perhaps I may meet one such as my soul has ever yearned for. If not, I shall return to the world of my own creation which hitherto has been almost my only joy. I have, however, learnt not to hope too much. My dream may, probably will, be dispelled; it will be my last."

Woodhouse spoke not for some time, he pondered over her words, but could not understand their import, at length he said,

"Maud, one so young as you are ought not to despair of meeting happiness even in this cold world. You should endeavour to set as stern a guard over your inmost thoughts and feelings as you do over your outward manner."

This kindly meant and sensible speech was misunderstood by his companion, and aroused all her bitter feelings as well as her pride, causing a fierce contest in her heart, which, alas! ended by the overthrow of her nobler feelings.

This unfortunate speech put her thoughts at work.

Had Woodhouse discovered that she loved him, and wished to subdue the feeling. Had he, too, seen through her mask of assumed gaiety when in his presence? And was he pitying her and urging her not to despair?

Such ideas almost maddened her, and in an instant her whole manner changed. The pensive expression was replaced by the too frequent careless haughtiness, and Woodhouse, who grieved as he saw the change, was at a loss to know how he had offended.

On reaching home Maud found General Ryan and his daughter Edith there. That night Maud sang and played more than usual; her spirits were almost wildly gay, and the excitement lent a strange brilliancy to her dark eyes. None of

the party guessed what a sad heart this assumed gaiety veiled. Woodhouse remained all night, as it was late ere the little party separated, and Mrs. Courtenay had asked him to escort Lady Boothby and Maud to the Bridgnorth Station on the following morning.

CHAPTER XXII.

"God bless you, dear Dora," were Maud's last words to her supposed rival; "treasure Woodhouse in your heart as he deserves. Cherish his every word and look of love. I have known him for years, and a more noble-minded, kind hearted man does not exist. Give him all the deep, fervent love of your pure, warm young heart. Guard his happiness as a precious treasure, and estimate his devotion as a pearl above all price. But, dear Dora, let not your love for him grow into worship."

With a fond embrace the friends parted. Maud took an affectionate leave of her mother, and followed Lady Boothby and Woodhouse to the carriage waiting at the gate. In a short time

they reached the station, and ere long the train started, leaving Woodhouse on the platform in anything but a happy state of mind, as he murmured—

"Poor child! I fear much trouble and mortification are in store for you. Yours is not a mind that flattering homage or even fame will satisfy."

It was late in the evening when Lady Boothby and her young friend arrived at the Paddington Station. A carriage was awaiting to convey them to her ladyship's town residence. Sir Harry Boothby came from the library to meet them. He received his wife most affectionately, and welcomed Maud in a very cordial manner.

"My dear Julia, you and your friend must be almost starved after your long journey. I have had a repast made ready for you in the dining-room."

"Thank you, my dear, we shall both do justice to the good things I have no doubt you have provided for us. Are you hungry, Maud?"

"Indeed I am," was the reply.

"Then we will go at once, and merely take off our bonnets and travelling dresses."

They went forthwith to the dining-room, where they found not merely an elegant repast prepared, but a bright blazing fire as well, both of which they enjoyed. They sat chatting till nearly midnight, when Sir Harry asked her ladyship if she intended keeping her friend up all night?

"Oh! it was very forgetful of me!"

And rising, she invited Maud to follow her, which she did, after bidding Sir Harry good night.

Maud was charmed by the elegant suite of rooms which had been prepared for her.

"I hope you will sleep well, Maud. You must make the most of the long nights now, for as the season advances you will get no beauty sleep. My brother-in-law, Augustus, will be here to-morrow. You will soon become very friendly. He is already prepossessed in your favour from having read all your writings. He will understand and appreciate you."

"I feel quite anxious to meet him," answered Maud.

"Yes, but you must not fall in love with him," said Lady Boothby, with a laugh.

"Oh! no fear of that," returned Maud; "I am not one of those women whose only object in life is to what they call settle themselves; nor were you, dear Julia."

"No, indeed, Maud, marriage is very desirable for young women; but I am no advocate for it unless there is something more between the husband and wife than mere what is wrongly called love. To make happiness there must be sympathy —a sympathy in their pursuits. But this is no fit time to be talking on any subject. You must be tired, so I say, God bless you! good night."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BRIGHT sun was shining when Maud Courtenay awoke the following morning, and it was some time ere she could arouse herself, for she had slept soundly all night, to realise the fact that she was not in Bridgnorth. A sigh of relief escaped from her as she thought of her freedom from the presence of Cecil Woodhouse.

"Yes," she muttered, "I shall now be able to tear from my heart my ill-requited affection. I fancied he loved me, but, alas! the feeling was no warmer than a brother's love. I shall be happier when I know that he has set his affections on one who will appreciate him, and who is worthy to be his wife. I will now devote my heart and mind to my writings, and perhaps I may in this new

sphere meet with some one who will understand my feelings and aspirations."

These thoughts were interrupted by a slight tap on the door, and the entrance of a maid servant with hot water.

Maud arose, and was soon dressed, and in less than an hour descended to the breakfast room, with a firm spirit and an unusually cheerful heart. She was unable to define her feelings, or to account for such a sudden gleam of sunshine

Lady Boothby met her visitor with much warmth of manner, and the two friends had a cosy meal together.

"My dear Maud, I shall stand upon no ceremony with you. I have several letters to write, which I fear will occupy me till luncheon. Henry goes to his club in the morning, so you will be uninterrupted in whatever way you may choose to amuse yourself. You will find heaps of music in the drawing-room, as well as a goodly collection of modern books, amongst which some volumes you will know something about," she

said, with a smile and an affectionate manner. "No visitor will call before luncheon, so you will be quite undisturbed unless Augustus should stroll in. However, he is one of us."

"But, my dear Julia," said Maud, smiling, "how am I to know Augustus from the Duke of Northwich, whose card I saw in the drawing-room?"

Sir Harry Boothby entered the room at the moment, and greeting Maud in a most friendly manner, said—

"In answer to your question, which I heard as I came in, I say the Duke is not likely to gain an entrance to the drawing-room without being announced."

"Yes, and to give you a clue by which to know Augustus," said Lady Boothby, laughing, and pointing to her husband, "look on this picture and on that which may disturb your solitude unceremoniously, and you need neither ask his name nor the relationship that exists between him and my respected husband."

"Is Mr. Boothby so very like Sir Harry?"

asked Maud, looking up frankly at the fine face and figure of the handsome baronet.

"Yes," said her ladyship, smiling affectionately at her husband, "but Augustus is somewhat older looking than Harry, although he is the younger by two or three years."

"Very complimentary," laughed Sir Harry, "like all ladies, you allow your feelings to get the better of your judgment."

"Oh! Maud, did you ever hear anything half so traitorous?"

"Do you call speaking the truth traitorous? I appeal to you, Miss Courtenay."

"Oh! I am quite willing to abide by the verdict of Maud," said Lady Boothby, with a smile.

"Well, if you appeal to me, dear Julia, I am bound to speak my honest sentiments, and to coincide with your husband."

"What, that in all cases women allow their feelings to get the better of their judgment?"

"No, not in all, but too frequently they allow

their prejudices to decide their judgment. In fact, they scarcely understand the name of justice."

"Justice," said Lady Boothby, more gravely, "is a cold word for one so young as you."

"But a right one, cold as it may seem," returned Maud, a shade of her old bitterness passing over her face, "and one that I have studied much, and know the worth of."

"The worth of," repeated Lady Boothby, in a musing tone.

"Yes, the worth of," continued Maud, her pale cheek glowing as she spoke, "I believe all virtue, all happiness, all goodness, to be founded on that single word justice."

As she raised her eyes she met the earnest and penetrating gaze of Sir Harry fixed upon her, evidently approvingly.

"I must leave the further discussion of the subject," said her ladyship, "till Augustus can take a part in it, for I can see my traitorous husband has determined to give his verdict against me. So I will go and write my letters."

"Yes, and I must be off to my club," said Sir Harry.

"And, Maud, dear, do you go and write songs, and dedicate them to—"

"Me," interrupted the baronet, with a joyous laugh.

"No, indeed, Mr. Impertinence. Dedicate them to me, Maud, will you? Not to a traitorous husband."

"One day I will, but not now. I am sure I shall have my time fully occupied in looking over the multitude of books and music in the drawing-room."

"Well, do just what pleases you most."

And Lady Boothby left the room.

"Allow me to conduct you to the drawing-room," said Sir Harry, and having done so, begged Maud to excuse his leaving her, as he had an early engagement.

Maud seated herself near a table, on which were most of the newest publications of the day, and a collection of the most popular songs, amongst the latter she found her last written and

favourite song, which had been recently published. She opened the piano and commenced singing. Her back was to the door, so that she could not see any one entering the room, and the music prevented her hearing any footstep. She became absorbed in the song so wildly plaintive, and then changing to a soft melody, sweet as the notes of the nightingale.

When she finished she rose from the piano, and turning, saw a tall, handsome man at the other end of the room, who, with his arms folded, was earnestly gazing upon her. In an instant Maud was assured that it was Augustus Boothby, from the great likeness to Sir Harry.

"I beg a thousand pardons for intruding," said the gentleman, coming forward, "but hearing music in the drawing-room, I imagined my sister was here. Pray accept my apologies for my intrusion. I am Augustus Boothby, and you," he continued, smiling, "I presume are the lady who arrived with my sister-in-law last evening. I believe I have the honour of addressing Miss Courtenay."

"Your conjecture is correct," answered Maud, bowing, "I assure you no apology is requisite, as Lady Boothby had prepared me for an unceremonious visit."

"Indeed! No doubt she expected I should be anxious to see her after so long an absence."

"Shall I send for Lady Boothby?" asked Maud. "She is busy writing in her boudoir, but I am sure she can spare time to come and see you. Shall I ring the bell?"

"No, no," returned Augustus, "I would not disturb her; she will come down at luncheon time, in the meanwhile," he added gaily, "let us become better acquainted; will you think me very unconscionable if I ask you to favour me with some more music?"

"Not at all," said Maud, smiling, and seating herself at the piano—"what shall I sing?"

"The charming song you were singing when I entered the room; it was exquisitely beautiful, so wild and plaintive, and the words though beautiful, so true, so sadly true."

Maud looked up, there was bitterness in his

tone, expressing a feeling she knew only too well; for a minute neither spoke, they seemed spell-bound and unable to withdraw their earnest gaze from each other; Maud broke the silence, and asked—

"Do you feel the truth of the words—can you feel the bitter truth?"

"Too well," he answered; "who wrote the words and the music? I never had the pleasure of hearing them before."

Maud made no reply, and Augustus took the piece from her hand and continued, "what is the title of the song? Oh, I see—'The lonely spirit seeketh rest!' written and composed by Maud Courtenay." Then the words and music are both yours?"

"Yes, both."

"Will you sing it again?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

Maud sang the song, her whole heart and soul being engaged in rendering the music and the words; when she had finished, Augustus neither moved nor spoke, his very soul was in

ecstasy for the moment; he dwelt not in this outer world, *his* spirit was far away in realms of light and glory. At length he recollected himself; thank her with words he could not, but gazing into Maud's eyes, as if he would read her very soul, he said—

"Have you realised the truth of those sad words? Surely one so young can scarcely have had such experience."

Maud was silent for a minute, then with an irresistible impulse, replied in a calm, subdued voice—

"Yes, I have yearned for sympathy from very girlhood, but have found it not; I have been always misunderstood. When I have been thoughtful, it was called temper, and by some stupidity; when I have pursued my studies of men and nature I have been taxed with unwomanly conduct."

Augustus looked intently into the mournful eyes of the speaker, and as he gazed, an undefinable sensation crept into his heart. Remark-

ing the curl upon her lip and the bitterness of her tone, he said—

"You speak bitterly, Miss Courtenay, but there is, alas, too much truth in what you say."

"I think so," said Maud.

"I know so," continued Augustus, "and I also feel an inward conviction that *we* shall soon perfectly know each other—shall understand each other, perhaps." He paused, feeling that he was telling more of his feelings than he was justified in doing, considering the very recent introduction to his companion. After a minute he continued —"Nothing gives me so much pleasure as talking to a thoughtful woman, the more especially when she possesses both intellect and talent—it is a rare treat to meet with one in these degenerate days; pray pardon me when I say that I anticicipate heartfelt pleasure in your society."

Their eyes met, and Maud felt as if an electric spark had passed from his soul to her own.

"Shall I not meet with many women in this mighty Babylon who possess talent and genius—women who think deeply and well."

"Yes," replied Augustus, "you will meet talent and genius of the very highest order, but you must not imagine that *all* possess high minds and refinement of feeling."

"But judging from their writings—"

"Ah! but you must not judge them by their writings, they frequently pourtray and possibly admire what they themselves lack—they can love, nay, almost adore those attributes which they possess not."

"Good heaven! is it possible?"

"Yes, not only possible, but a fact, Miss Courtenay; you must not hope too much. You have studied life earnestly and deeply, of that I feel certain from your writings, but you have indulged in a dream—a pure and holy one, but one that may fade from your vision and plunge you into a still deeper gulf of sorrow."

Maud almost started; her companion spoke of sorrow as if he knew her heart; he had studied nature in all its phases—had studied men and women—he saw by the curl of the maiden's lip and her haughty glance, that sorrow was no

stranger to her, and a mighty bond of sympathy sprung up in their hearts.

Maud's lip trembled, as she said in a sorrowful tone—

"Must then my dream of years be thus ruthlessly swept away?—must my last bright vision fade and never be realised?"

Augustus listened eagerly and intently to every word that fell from her lips; a thrill seemed to enter his very soul, a joy which had hitherto been almost a stranger.

"No, I trust not," he said, in reply to her sorrowful appeal, "I spoke only of a few, I merely wished to warn you not in every instance to believe that great intellect and great refinement were always coupled. I have met with many of both classes. No, Miss Courtenay, you must not despair of meeting kindred spirits; but you must expect to encounter many who will not understand you. There is a something which tells me that your lot will be similar to my own, and that has been a bitter one, God knows. Hope not too much; yours is a peculiar nature."

"I only seek for *one*," said Maud, uttering the words unconsciously.

"Then take comfort, Miss Courtenay," cried Augustus, who had listened to the innocent and sad words; "if *one* will content you, you will be happy. There is one who understands you—one who can sympathise with your every feeling—one who has been misunderstood as you have, whose sorrow is in common with your own, and one to whom such sympathy as you alone can give will be most precious—one, who like yourself, has been disenchanted."

They again gazed almost wildly into each other's eyes, a language known only to themselves seemed to reveal the truth. Augustus continued—

"Miss Courtenay, will you be a friend to that solitary man, to whom though hitherto personally unknown, you are not, and have long been no stranger?"

Maud's reply was a solemn and softly-spoken affirmative, as she lifted her dark eyes, now lit by the bright light of hope, to those that were gazing on her as none had ever gazed before.

Lady Boothby entered the room, putting a stop to any further remarks.

Augustus greeted his sister-in-law most affectionately, who, on her part, showed equal pleasure in the meeting after so long an absence.

"You have made each other's acquaintance?" said Lady Boothby, with a smile, "without the formality of an introduction."

"Yes," said Maud, smiling, "I did not mistake your brother for the Duke of Northwich."

"No, Julia, Miss Courtenay did me the honour of saying she recognised me at once from my likeness to Sir Harry."

"A great compliment," cried Lady Boothby, laughing, "I told Maud she would require no further introduction; upon my word I think you are both improved by the chance encounter. It is not often that I have seen either of you looking so pleased and animated; I trust the meeting has been an agreeable one."

"We endeavoured to make it so; and Miss Courtenay at least has been eminently successful," said Augustus, courteously, then he added,

almost musingly, "we knew a little of each other before."

"What do you mean?" asked Lady Boothby. "Ah! I see, Miss Maud Courtenay, the authoress, wished to see Mr. Augustus Boothby, the poet, the said Miss Courtenay and the said Mr. Boothby having read each other's books; am I correct in my surmises?"

"Perhaps so," said Augustus, "at any rate you may think so, Julia."

"Maud, you remember the conversation we had this morning at breakfast?" asked Lady Boothby.

"Yes," said Maud, "it led us to speak of justice."

"It concerned Sir Harry and Augustus."

"Well, what of that," asked Maud.

"Was I not right?"

Maud looked curiously at Augustus, and then said—

"I think not, I should say quite the reverse."

"For shame, Maud; however, right or wrong is not of much importance, I merely want to tell

you, Augustus, what a cold-blooded creature you are."

"For shame, Julia."

"She talks of justice," continued her ladyship, smiling like a sage, "and declares that all worth, goodness, and happiness are founded on it. What do you say to such stern philosophy in a girl of twenty-two?"

"That I am delighted to meet with a woman, and especially one so young, who can both comprehend and appreciate the true sense of the word *justice.* Pray let me hear your opinion, Miss Courtenay."

"My opinion," said Maud, with a grave smile, "is that we should act in all things justly, and that when we give our opinion, to pass a judgment, without allowing private feeling or prejudice to have the slightest influence over us, or induce us to swerve from the strict rules of justice, this is public justice; but there is a *private* court that should be held in our own hearts, and attended to as rigidly, aye, and if possible, more rigidly than the public one."

A bright smile lighted up the face of Augustus as he said—

"You are more than a philosopher, Miss Courtenay; a glorious truth speaks out in your every word; you have given your views of public justice, will you now kindly tell us what your thoughts are of that inner court in our own hearts? There is more to be said for that."

"Yes, undoubtedly," said Maud, "but where am I to begin?"

"Well, we will submit a case."

"*We*," laughed Lady Boothby, "who are *we?*"

"You and I, if you don't object."

Lady Boothby nodded in approval.

"Well, this is *our* case—suppose you loved a man whom your parents objected to and disliked, how would you in that case act?"

"It would depend."

"Depend on what?"

"Whether there was a reasonable excuse for objection," Maud replied.

"But," said Augustus, with a smile, "do you

think if you loved, you could pass a free and unprejudiced opinion upon the object of your affection?"

"Yes, as impartial, as unprejudiced and just a judgment as if he were utterly indifferent to me, for there would be a sober duty involved in it."

"But suppose he had many faults—vices even, how would you act?"

"If he really and truly loved me he would amend his faults; if it were only a passing fancy, he would not care for my opinion, and would perpetuate his vices. In the former case, I should engage myself conditionally, and in the latter, break with him entirely."

"You would consider the case justly—your parents wishes and your lover's claims?"

"Certainly, I would weigh the claims of each, and after due deliberation decide justly, and consequently rightly."

"But your future happiness—" said Augustus.

"I would not allow that to influence my decision, though it might cause me years of misery,

that would be lessened, after a time, by the knowledge and the conviction that I had done right; I think my cross-examination should now be closed," and Maud smiled on her interrogator.

"One other question, Miss Courtenay," said Augustus.

"Oh," said Lady Boothby, "I think Maud has had cross-questioning enough."

"Only another question," persisted Augustus, "and I have done."

"What is it?" asked Maud.

"Suppose your affections were placed on a poor gentleman."

"I would never marry any but a man of large fortune, and that would not suit my temper, having no real property myself," she replied, with a curl of her lip.

"Then nothing would induce you to marry a poor man," urged Lady Boothby.

"I do not say that; I would rather marry a poor gentleman, if I could earn sufficient to help him; I could not bear to take from him his little comforts."

Augustus laughed, and said—

"At any rate, you will never be driven to that extremity."

"I presume the subject is exhausted, Mr. Boothby," said Maud, smiling. "It is one that I have not thought deeply upon, and I am philosopher enough to conclude that when I meet with my *beau ideal* it will be soon enough to commence ceasing to be speculative; at present I have deeper and more useful studies."

Augustus looked earnestly into Maud's countenance, and said somewhat bitterly—

"Miss Courtenay, you are very cold."

"Yes, returned Maud, in a low bitter tone, I have been told that before, and all have thought it."

At this moment luncheon was announced, and Lady Boothby led the way to the dining room, followed by her brother-in-law, Maud leaning on his arm. He whispered as they descended the stairs—

"I did not mean those words—I saw deeper."

Maud started and their eyes met, and a strange joy, similar to that he had felt, crept into her heart, such as she had never before experienced.

Thus commenced the intimacy between them.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THAT night, Sir Harry and Lady Boothby went to the Opera at Her Majesty's Theatre, accompanied by Maud and Augustus. Many glasses were raised to Lady Boothby's box as Maud, simply but tastefully dressed in white tarlatan, with a single flower in her hair entered, leaning on the arm of Augustus.

Lady Boothby and her young friend sat in front, and in an instant a whisper ran from box to box, and from stall to stall, as Maud seated herself, for it was generally known she was the talented authoress, whose works had gained a world-wide repute.

The Opera selected for the evening was Rossini's "Semiramide," and the charming music

entered into the very soul of the young girl, who became perfectly absorbed, listening with eyes glistening, and a slight colour mantling her usually pale cheeks. Although the eyes of the brilliant assembly were continually fixed upon her, she, on her part, cared nothing for the company; her whole feelings were engrossed by the music of the great composer.

The opera concluded, the little party retired in the same order as they had entered the box; not a word was spoken till they had got into the lobby, and then Augustus pressed Maud's hand warmly, and said, in an almost passionate voice—

"Was not the music grand, nay, almost sublime?"

"It was both, and so exquisite that I wished it would never cease. Does Julia come often to the opera?"

"Very often, and I always accompany her, and shall now have much greater pleasure in my visits, knowing there is one who feels as I do, and appreciates the glorious intellect of the composers."

He bent down as he spoke, and gazed into his companion's face with a strange earnestness.

"Yes," said Maud, in a soft, low voice; "you are right. I, too, felt that there was one who could sympathise in my intense enjoyment. What a blessing is sympathy; how it gladdens and makes the heart all sunshine."

"There is no joy like that which the knowledge of another's sympathy gives. Let us then cherish it, for it is more precious than all on earth beside."

"We are very unfashionable, Miss Courtenay, in one respect," said Augustus, gaily, as he handed his companion into the carriage. "People, for the most part, come to look at each other, instead of attending to the music. We, on the contrary, come to listen to the music, and not to criticise those assembled."

"I need not ask you if you enjoyed the evening," said Sir Harry, as soon as they were seated.

"I have no words at command to express the pleasure and real enjoyment I have had," said

Maud. "But I fear from what Mr. Augustus says, we have been, or rather I have been, quite *outré*, quite unfashionable."

"Well, there is one consolation," replied Sir Harry, "that if we are considered eccentric we are well compensated by the great pleasure we experienced in listening to the glorious music—a pleasure, by the bye, which the slaves to fashion can never know."

The carriage reached Portman Square, and in a few minutes, Augustus took leave and went to his lodgings, and thus ended the first day of Maud's acquaintance with Mr. Boothby.

That night Maud forgot for awhile her sorrows, and laid her head on her pillow with gladness in her heart, and a joy that she had never before known. She felt that her last bright dream had been realised; but she little knew that once the love of the heart is blighted, it takes a long time to overcome and subdue its bitter anguish. She forgot for the time Cecil Wood-

house and those heart burnings which of late had caused her days and nights of anguish.

Day by day Augustus Boothby was a constant visitor at his brother's house, and accompanied Lady Boothby and Miss Courtenay in their morning rides, and to the opera, &c., in the evenings. In fact, Maud was becoming as necessary to him as the sunshine, for, from the very first moment of their meeting, he had been instinctively drawn towards her. He felt that she was the first, the only person who understood him, and a deeper and warmer feeling was gradually stealing into his heart.

One morning he was alone with Maud in the drawing-room, Sir Harry having gone to his club, and Lady Boothby busily engaged in her boudoir, when Maud asked:

"Mr. Boothby, what is pride?"

Some allusion to pride had been made by Augustus.

"Pride," he returned, "is a feeling of the human heart, very difficult to describe or define, seeing that there exist so many phases of pride."

"Well, suppose we begin with pride of wealth," said Maud.

"Oh, that is detestable."

"What say you to pride of birth?"

"I think no right judging persons having good blood in their veins are exempt from pride; there are certain duties demanded of them to maintain their high or ancient name in reverence, and to guard it from all dishonour. This, I think, is a proper and just pride."

"Yes," said Maud, "that is correct; but I cannot see the difference between the pride of high birth and that of the honest labourer who can recollect nothing beyond the unsullied life of his father and his grandfather, but yet would not, for any consideration, do anything to sully their good names."

"You are quite right," replied Augustus; "that man is as much to be respected for his honest pride as the noble, whose pedigree might be traced from the Conquest."

"How often do we see this pride of birth in

historic names sullied by young men who are guilty of all sorts of disgraceful acts?"

"Quite true, and yet these very men who would think nothing of getting largely into debt with their tradesmen, or obtaining money from those harpies of society—bill discounters—in a manner but one remove from swindling—these men would look with contempt on marriage with a wealthy plebeian lady. These are facts, and no exaggeration, and withal they still hold to the pride of birth."

"Do you call that a noble pride?" asked Maud.

"Certainly not; in such cases, pride of birth is paltry. The poor man's pride is immensely superior."

"Yes, unquestionably. What honour can there be in having had a long line of vicious and dishonourable ancestors, let their race be ever so ancient. I know I am proud; I hope it is a higher pride than this; but, alas! it causes far more unhappiness—I may say misery."

"I fully enter into your feelings," said

Augustus, with earnestness. "You feel that your pride would—and, in fact, is, misunderstood by the world, who set it down to the pride of intellect; I know it is not. You do not worship—if I may be allowed the expression—at the mere shrine of an ancient pedigree, or of great wealth. You would despise both, unless accompanied with intellect."

"Yes, that is it, and the world may call it pride if they choose; but it is not, for intellect is planted by nature in the human breast."

The conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Lady Boothby.

"Maud, I am sorry to have left you so long, but I hope you have not got wearied of each other," said her ladyship, with a smile.

"Quite the contrary," replied Augustus, his grave manner changing; "nor should I, had your absence been twice as long as it has been."

"My dear Julia," said Maud, her manner also changing from grave to gay, "Time has not passed heavily with us, far from it."

"You will wonder what has detained me so long. The fact is, I have been writing invitations for a soirée next month. Oh! here comes my husband."

"And a very hungry husband he is," said the baronet, laughing. "Come, let us have luncheon."

They forthwith went downstairs to the dining-room.

When they were seated, Sir Harry said—

"My dear Julia, I have some news for you in the matrimonial line. Who do you think was married this morning?"

"I have not the slightest notion."

"Miss Wilde, to that young Brice, of the Lancers. The match is without the consent of the young lady's parents, and without the knowledge of his. He has not a penny beyond his pay, and she has not a farthing."

Lady Boothby shrugged her shoulders as she remarked on the imprudence of such a match, saying good-naturedly,

"I suppose most, I cannot say *all*, young un-

married ladies would deem me cold to speak of prudence where love was concerned?"

Maud looked up quickly, and said—

"Do you not think, dear Julia, that there is a good deal of selfishness in this careless and total disregard of prudence. Did Miss Wilde give a moment's thought when she took this step, of how many comforts Mr. Brice would have to debar himself to enable him to support her, and that, too, upon his own limited income. It strikes me, if she had thought at all of his comfort, she would have delayed the marriage for a time."

"Delays are dangerous, Miss Courtenay," said Sir Harry, with a smile.

"They may be, Sir Harry; but I have a very poor opinion of young ladies who think only of themselves."

"But," continued Sir Harry, laughing, "suppose the young lady thought the only step that could make the youth happy was letting him become her legal protector."

"Then she must have very little knowledge of the world."

Sir Harry only shrugged his shoulders in reply.

"I think not," continued Maud, "or else she would look forward to her husband's discontent, when he would be obliged to sit down to a miserable dinner, and to wear a thread-bare coat and shabby hat, when but for her selfishness he might have had his comforts. He may not care for the loss of those comforts, but as time wears on, and his difficulties increase, what a hard struggle he will have to hide his fears or apprehensions from her. Can a woman look forward to this state of things, and plunge the man she professes to love—for love him she cannot—into such an abyss of wretchedness."

"Yet, Maud, these marriages are set down by the world as proof of great disinterestedness," said Lady Boothby.

"I know the world says a woman can suffer hardship for the man she loves. But does

the husband, if he have a spark of manly pride, like to see her suffer. I again say the act is one of selfishness."

"You speak with great sense and truth, Miss Courtenay," said Sir Harry, his look resting upon her approvingly.

"Dear Maud," put in Lady Boothby, "how would you remedy this selfishness? for, perhaps, if the lady broke off the engagement, it would cause the young man more pain than even the rash marriage would in after years. Now, place yourself in the position of Miss Wilde, how would you have acted?"

"I cannot understand long engagements. To my mind, the man is unjustly used. He goes on working and toiling, month after month and year after year, his object being to earn sufficient means to support his affianced in comfort. Whilst he is thus toiling and working for the object of his love, she is living a life of ease and comparative luxury, without exerting her abilities in any way to help earn the little

fortune that is to give her and her intended husband the happiness they both look forward to. Is this just? Why should not a woman exert herself to work equally with the man whom she professes to love? To work for him should be the first and proudest wish of her heart, and I do not hesitate to say, if she truly loved him it would be so. True love prompts no hasty and selfish marriages, or toil on one side alone. Let the work be on both sides. Even that would be but a slight proof of a woman's love."

"My dear Maud," exclaimed Sir Harry, "you possess the most correct ideas of justice of any woman I have ever met. Excuse this plain speaking from an old married man, who is privileged to remark anything. It may not seem well in me to say so, but strange, and true it is, that the thoughts you have expressed on this subject have always been my own. I confess, too, that the man placed in similar circumstances is equally selfish. There is utter selfishness on both sides."

"But, Maud," said Lady Boothby, "we must

not lose sight of the fact that every woman does not possess your power of earning a livelihood. Were you in the position of Miss Wilde, you could, in the course of a year or two, add sufficient to your husband's little income to enable you to live in comfort, and keep him free from sorrow or anxiety on your account. All have not your intellect."

"I meant not that, Julia," returned Maud. "I meant not that; but surely a girl in Miss Wilde's position in society must have had an education fitting her for a gentlewoman. Is she not a linguist, a musician, or does she not draw? Surely any woman who has had a liberal education need not be at a loss to earn money."

"Suppose her parents," observed Sir Harry, "objected to her becoming a governess."

"Do you, Sir Harry, consider that any reasonable or just objection could be raised to a proceeding so high and pure in its motives?"

"Certainly not a reasonable or just one," returned the baronet, firmly.

"Now I," continued Maud, "should act upon my own responsibility, and represent the matter to my parents, pointing out not merely its reasonableness, but the purity of purpose, then if they could not, or would not see it, well and good. I should act, as I said before, on my own responsibility, and my own ideas of justice and duty, for I consider there is as much duty due to that man whom a woman has promised to marry, as there is to her parents."

"The gentleman might object to his affianced taking such a step. He might not like to see her filling a situation—what shall I say—derogatory to her," said Sir Harry, with a somewhat scornful smile.

"Which objection would be caused by what the world calls pride; and truly it is pride of the very worst description, the exhibition of which would serve to draw all respect for a man from my heart."

"My dear Maud," said Lady Boothby, "what you say is perfectly correct, and I quite coincide

with you, but be not too unselfish. You will find those who will let you work, and shew their ingratitude afterwards."

Maud made no reply, but she felt that had the man she had loved, and did still love, been poor, she would have worked for him, and have rejoiced in the happiness such labour would have afforded; she could have gone on her cold, dull path of life with a peaceful, if not a happy spirit.

Luncheon over, Lady Boothby and Maud rose and left the room, and prepared for their drive.

As soon as they had retired, Sir Harry said to his brother—

"That girl possesses more sense than any woman I have ever met. Yes, in addition to her glorious talents, she has sound, unromantic sense to an extent that I have never met before. This may be seen in her published works. She is totally different to almost all girls of her age. There is no sickly sentimentality about her. She is as much above them as the Alpine mountains are above molehills."

"Indeed she is, Harry," said Augustus, in a peculiar tone of voice. "I never met with any woman half as clever, and whose views of men and things were so correct and just as Miss Courtenay's."

At this moment the ladies re-entered the room equipped for their drive.

"We shall see you at dinner, Augustus," said Lady Boothby. "Do you intend riding this morning?"

"No; I am sorry to say I cannot; but I shall look forward with great pleasure to the dinner-hour."

"*Au revoir!*"

And the two ladies left the room, accompanied by both gentlemen to the carriage, which was in waiting.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE day fixed for a literary party, to which Maud, Augustus, and Sir Harry had accepted invitations, had arrived, and the three were once more in the drawing-room.

"Will your friends muster in great strength to-night, Julia?" asked Maud.

"Yes, there will be a tolerably large party, consisting of the *élite* of London society. You will be the centre of attraction, so many have expressed their anxiety to be introduced to you."

"How amusing," laughed Maud.

"Very," said Augustus, with a smile. "We must all undergo this at the commencement of our career, Miss Courtenay. I have a vivid recollection of the first soirée I attended after the

appearance of my first poem. I was extremely amused, as I have not the slightest doubt you will be to-night."

"Why?" asked Maud.

"By witnessing the varieties of character. They will serve you, too, as models. You will find abundance to occupy your time and observation."

"Of that I have no doubt," said Maud; "a literary party must, as you say, prove a valuable study. I shall endeavour to use it as such. My dear Julia, you must tell me the names of your visitors."

"Oh! Augustus will point out to you the most brilliant stars," replied her ladyship, going to another part of the room.

"Yes, and amongst them Miss Courtenay will be the brightest," cried Augustus, with an irresistible impulse seizing both Maud's hands, and gazing into her mournful eyes. The words were not the words of flattery, they came from his very heart, and this Maud could not doubt, as she wit-

nessed the glance of his expressive eyes, and heard the deep, low tones in which he spoke. This sudden impulse was not seen by Lady Boothby.

Had these words been spoken by any other person Maud would have deemed them gross flattery, but she was fully aware of Augustus's utter contempt of flattery. She knew he meant what he said.

Lady Boothby, returning to where Maud was sitting, asked—

"My dear girl, have you thought over your toilette for this evening?"

"No, I have given it no reflection," replied Maud.

"Then I must insist on your making a more elaborate one than usual," said her ladyship, gaily.

"Very well, Julia, what shall I put on?" asked Maud.

"Oh! that white satin robe; its long train makes you look taller. What do you intend wearing in your hair?"

"Nothing."

"Not a jewel, or a flower?"

"Neither."

"Well, just as you please."

Evening came; Mr. Boothby had arrived, and was standing near the fire-place, when Maud entered the drawing room. The careless grace of the attitude, and the thoughtful expression on his beautifully chiselled features attracted the girl's attention, and she stood for a moment in intense admiration of the proud, talented man before her. In another moment Augustus raised his head suddenly and observed her. He was too refined, and had too much good taste to compliment her on her personal appearance; his eyes, however, took in at a glance her elegant figure with admiration; but a warmer feeling kindled in his heart as he gazed on her thoughtful brow.

They had been conversing only a few minutes when Sir Harry and Lady Boothby entered the room, and immediately after they were seated in the carriage and being driven to Lady Fortescue's, in Belgrave Square. When they arrived the splendid suite of rooms was nearly filled, and as their names were announced the eyes of

most of the assembled guests were turned towards the door. It was well known that the talented young authoress was to be present.

Maud entered the room, leaning on the arm of Mr. Boothby, following Sir Harry and his wife. A buzz of admiration was heard as Augustus and his lovely charge passed along to pay their respects to Lady Fortescue, to whom Maud had been previously introduced, when her ladyship made a morning call on Lady Boothby, soon after Maud's arrival in town.

Mr. Boothby introduced his fair companion to many of the celebrities, and, as he had foretold, Maud found a literary party in one of the highest circles of London society a subject for deep study and close observation.

"Now, Mr. Boothby," she said, as she reached the last of the rooms, "I must monopolise you no longer, for I perceive many who are wishing for a word with you. Thank you for introducing me to so many stars!"

"You appear to have forgotten what I told you."

"Forgotten what?"

"That *you* are the principal star. Like every new author, you are the 'lion' of the day, and must submit to be stared at, courted, flattered, and idolised."

"Oh! I can undergo this ordeal and set it down for what it is worth. Now allow me to take a seat; I want to be alone for awhile."

"That, I fear, you will find an impossibility, for there are many in this gay assembly who are most anxious to take my place," said Augustus, smiling.

"Pray hide me away in some remote corner whence I can see and not be seen. Look! there is a vacant seat on that sofa, on which that strange looking old gentleman is seated. Who is he?"

"Oh! we are well acquainted," said Augustus, laughing; "but if you wish to remain *incog.*, he must not see me as your companion. He is at every literary party. He is a man of high intellect, a good classic, and, in fact, England cannot produce a better read man, a greater philosopher, or

a deeper thinker. He is an immense admirer of your works. His age will enable you to introduce yourself to him. So I shall leave you to find your way to the couch," and with a graceful bow and a pleasant smile, Mr. Boothby retraced his steps through the rooms, till he met those with whom he wished to converse.

Maud moved towards the elderly gentleman, and sat down near him. He was evidently engaged in observing and studying from a distance the moving mass before him. He was a fine, gentlemanly old man, and in youth must have been very handsome; his eyes were as yet undimmed by age, and the high and intellectual forehead spoke of deep thought and intense study; he was somewhat below the middle height, and had the appearance of a courteous gentleman. On Maud seating herself near him, he appeared to think it requisite to slightly move, and bow, which he did in a pleasing and graceful manner. It was natural that a few observations and remarks should be made between

an old gentleman and a very young lady, which at length glided into a pleasant and sociable conversation. It was evident that he had not the slightest notion who his companion was, and at length he said in a lower tone than he had before adopted:

"I am expecting to see Miss Courtenay; I have not met her yet, having been out of town till yesterday, or I should have called at Lady Boothby's to pay my respects to the young authoress. Her ladyship has been staying with the young lady's mother at Bridgnorth. Have you seen her?"

"Yes, several times," replied Maud, somewhat amused at her absurd position.

"Ha! What is she like? Is she very handsome?"

"No, not at all so," returned his companion.

"I'll engage there is something more in her face than mere beauty of features or complexion. Genius must be stamped on her brow; for her writings are the most talented of their class that I have read for many a day," said the old gentleman, with evident pleasure.

"Do you read novels?" asked Maud.

"When they are good. Why not?"

"I should have supposed you would have only cared to read works of a higher grade."

"In the first place," returned the old gentleman, "Miss Courtenay's novels are to a certain extent profound; at least, she does not condescend to utter frivolous, thoughtless, or sentimental expressions that too often characterise the fictions written by women. I have read the first works of all the novelists of the last half century, it is rarely I ever read the second; but when I like the first I read all succeeding by the same author. Of course, I do not read a novel with the same interest that I do a scientific work; but Miss Courtenay's novels, if I may call them so, for they are more like truthful narratives of the lives of persons she has known, have interested me—nay, delighted me; her sentiments are so pure and noble, and the language extremely elegant. Some of the scenes in her last work quite melted my old heart; they

were so natural and life-like. That girl—for a girl only they tell me she is—must have studied life deeply, and from her sentiments I should fear sorrow has been no stranger to her—she pictures vividly the deepest and bitterest emotions of the heart. And yet she may have no other attractive quality save her genius. She may be a woman who writes for no higher motive than gain. Bah! I abominate such women, and may not Miss Courtenay be one of this class. I confess, however, that I do not believe she is, and I hope I am correct. Of course, you have read her works?"

"Yes, all of them," replied Maud, quietly.

"Which do you prefer?"

"The last."

The old gentleman showed symptoms of displeasure at what he considered the coldness of his companion in speaking of these books which he had been so highly eulogising, and though he gazed steadfastly into his companion's face, he was too well bred to display in words his chagrin, so he dexterously changed the subject.

"Do you know many of Lady Fortescue's friends assembled here this evening?"

"Not many. I am almost a stranger to London," replied Maud, and then added, quickly, "Can you tell me who that gentleman is, passing the lady in the amber dress?"

"Yes, that is —— one of the cleverest men of the day. No subject is too trivial for his great mind to study. He was talking to me for an hour this morning on the subject of female education."

"That is no trivial subject," said Maud. "May I ask, what are his views?"

"What do you think they are?" returned the old gentleman.

"It is impossible for me to even guess."

"Perhaps, then, you will give me your own."

"I am too young to give an opinion on so important a subject."

"Not at all; I shall be pleased to fathom your young mind on female education," he said, quickly.

"Well," replied Maud, "my opinion is that

the present system of female education is not only bad, but pernicious."

"How so?"

"In the first place, teachers are too fond of giving their pupils a smattering of so many things before they thoroughly understand one. They profess to teach English, but do they? They hear lessons from 'Murray's Grammar,' and 'Johnson's Dictionary,' and if the pupils can spell correctly, they are satisfied: they never dream of asking about the derivation of words, nor teach the Latin and Greek grammar, both essential in my opinion. Why should not girls, as well as boys, be taught these languages, and taught to appreciate them? Why not get rid of the almost useless elaborate fancy needlework, embroidery, &c., and devote the time thus spent to the Greek and Latin. Music is a science and tends to elevate the mind, and so does painting: these should be cultivated if the pupil shows a taste for them, not without. In a vast number of cases the taste for music is of a very low order: flimsy love ditties, waltzes and other ephemeral

things are all that is cared for, whilst scientific music is disregarded. This state of things is not altogether want of talent, but the want of proper guidance in teachers. Let ancient and classic history be early inculcated to induce girls to think more and give them a warmer interest in a higher order of reading. Tell me, do you think my view of female education a mere dream, or an impossibility?"

"It is neither a dream nor an impossibility. It is quite in accordance with my own views, and those of one of the cleverest men of the day. I should scarcely have imagined that one so young," and the old gentleman looked admiringly on the girl beside him, "had thought so deeply on the subject. I am glad to hear it, and you will permit me to congratulate you on the clear judgment and good sense you possess."

Maud bowed, and a pause of two or three minutes ensued; at length the gentleman said:

"I hope you will not consider me impertinent in asking if you have adopted your scheme of education?"

"Yes; as far as circumstances have permitted," replied Maud.

"I expect you are an ardent student of—"

"Of whom?" asked Maud, quickly.

"Of nature—of human nature," returned the old gentleman, looking keenly in his companion's face.

Maud raised her eyes to his, uttered no word, but said mentally—

"How did you know that?"

"Ah! I see you are astonished that I should form a correct judgment from one conversation. I have studied life deeply and philosophically, I have studied character, and I am sure that you have not lived in this world, short as has been your life, for nothing. You did not answer the question I asked just now."

"What was it?"

"As to your education."

"Well, I may almost say I educated myself, for ill health and other circumstances prevented my making much progress during my school days, and like most children I cared little about it.

As time wore on and my health improved, I thirsted for knowledge, and determined on pursuing the course I had marked out for myself. I searched deeply into ancient and modern history, and read all the best authors whose works I could procure. In music I took especial delight from childhood; I care for none but that of the highest order. Music, I may say, is a necessity of my life."

"My dear young lady," exclaimed her companion, "I am inexpressibly glad to have met and conversed with you. You have heeded the voice of reason and attended to the leaning of your talents. Every one knows and feels his capabilities, though none besides may ever discover them. There are thousands of human beings who possess both talent and genius, but from want of education the hidden treasures of their mind never shine forth. How desolate must such a being be, possessing talent and intellect unknown and unapplied."

"How truly you have spoken," said Maud, without the slightest tinge of her old bitterness.

"I myself but just escaped the misery of which you have spoken."

The old gentleman fixed his eyes with a penetrating glance on his young companion's face, as though he wanted to read something there. Maud observed him not, for she was musing deeply on the past.

"It is very strange," said the old gentleman.

"What is strange?" asked Maud, thinking the question was addressed to herself.

"That I have not as yet been introduced to the new authoress, Miss Courtenay, and equally strange that I have not seen the Boothbys. I long to know this talented girl, for judging her by her writings I am inclined to hope I may not be disappointed in finding the pure, bright creature I have pictured to my mind's eye. Can I assist you in finding your friends? But first, will you think it too great a liberty if I inquire your name, as I should esteem myself highly honoured if allowed to improve and continue our acquaintance. My name is Fitzgerald, and I live in Eaton Square."

"I shall be equally delighted to improve our acquaintance, Mr. Fitzgerald," said Maud, gracefully, "especially as you are intimate with a friend of mine—Mr. Augustus Boothby."

"Augustus Boothby!" repeated Mr. Fitzgerald.

"Yes, I am on a visit to Lady Boothby, and my name is Maud Courtenay."

For a minute Mr. Fitzgerald appeared unable to utter a word, but gradually an expression of pleasure settled on his countenance, and he took Maud's hand pressing it warmly.

"My dear Miss Courtenay, no words can express my pleasure in thus meeting you, and the promise, of what I consider a high privilege, of being permitted to improve our acquaintance. I knew not who I was addressing when I made such frequent allusions to your works. I may, therefore, be acquitted of flattery in speaking of them as I did—truthfully, and giving my real opinions. But, Miss Courtenay, how came you to be sitting alone and remain so long by the side of

an old man, when so many others are anxious to be introduced to you?"

"Mr. Boothby accompanied me to this room, and then left me at my own request. I wished to remain quiet for awhile, to watch those around me from a distance, where I was not observed."

Mr. Fitzgerald spoke not; his eyes were fixed on Maud's thoughtful countenance. At length he said, musingly—

"Thank God for once I am not disappointed; she is all I thought she must be."

"Mr. Boothby is coming," said Maud, as she beheld Augustus's tall, graceful figure approaching.

He reached them.

"How are you, Boothby?" said Mr. Fitzgerald, extending his hand. "You see I have discovered the bright star of the evening, and had the honour of a long conversation with her."

"I see," said Augustus, smiling, advancing to Maud, and offering her his arm. "I had a

suspicion you would unmask the lady. I must, however, take her from you, for my brother and sister are wishing to leave. You must come and pay Miss Courtenay a visit to-morrow. All our people will be delighted to see you again. Are you coming into the other rooms?"

"Yes, I will go and give myself the pleasure of speaking to Lady Boothby," said the old gentleman.

Maud, leaning on Mr. Boothby's arm, passed through the various rooms, and all eyes were directed to the talented pair. Augustus walked with a proud step through the gazing crowd, and at length they reached the spot where Sir Harry and Lady Boothby were awaiting their arrival.

Sir Harry and his wife shook hands cordially with Mr. Fitzgerald, expressing a friendly wish that he would dine with them the following day, and accompany them to the opera, which invitation was accepted. After taking leave of their hostess, they departed.

"How have you enjoyed your first literary

party?" asked Lady Boothby, as soon as they were seated in the carriage.

"Very much," Maud replied.

"And not been disappointed in finding it a useful study?" said Augustus.

"No. I have seen much to think of, and many persons whom I have long wished to see."

"I am glad of it," said Augustus.

"How did you like our old friend, Fitzgerald?" asked Sir Harry.

"Oh! very much indeed," said Maud, emphatically, "and shall be delighted to improve an acquaintance begun so unceremoniously."

"That you shall do," said Sir Harry; "you shall see as much of him as you like. He is one of the most sensible men, and one of the deepest thinkers I know."

"I am surprised," said Lady Boothby, "that he never wrote. I should think he would have taken a very high place in literature."

"No, my dear," said Sir Harry; "it is not every one who thinks deeply can write well."

"I agree with you, Harry," said Augustus. "Fitzgerald's mind is not formed for writing, although his intellect is of a very high order. As a critic, he is most just and unprejudiced."

Further conversation was interrupted, as the carriage stopped at their house.

END OF VOL. I.

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